

The Gospel According to David

Introduction`

God is Love. This is the good news that is needed by humanity. Sin once separated us from the full expression of God's love but all sin has been atoned for, and this atonement is the remedy for the condition that has caused all our pain, suffering and separation from the full measure of Divine Love.

There is no need to belabor the subject of the need of humanity for a remedy for the sin nature and what it causes everyday in human experience. All anyone has to do is look around in every family, community and nation on earth, and there they will see the sins causing suffering that collectively are beyond description. Only a fool would deny that something has gone terribly wrong.

In the midst of the resultant struggles, those whose hearts are full of pride take great pleasure in defeating the odds that are against them, and thus, exalt in their own physical, mental or spiritual strength. How foolish it is to exalt when one has conquered a perceived enemy, and yet, they are totally helpless to conquer all enemies. I have admired the tenacity of some individuals who display great courage and strength in some area of life, but I have also seen the pain when they fall at the hands of some enemy that was beyond their control. The enemies I speak of are sometimes circumstances that overwhelm even the strongest humans, and at other times it is a disease whose causes are so small that the most sophisticated instruments at our disposal are required to detect them.

Pride is at the heart of man's fall from grace and no amount of suffering causes all men everywhere to repent. Nevertheless, God in his mercy has made a provision for the restoration of what was lost in our fall.

Throughout the biblical account of the history of the nation of Israel and what preceded their existence, God has revealed his plan of restoration and taught lessons concerning how to return to his favor in stories, called types and shadows, and teachings through the words of his prophets.

The story of King David portrays the message of good news to us in Psalms, prophetic utterances, stories, types and shadows. In it we see Christ portrayed who made provision for our restoration, and at other times we identify with King David's humanity and weaknesses. King David was only a player on the stage and was in his own right a sinner in need of the very Savior he proclaimed, and sometimes portrayed.

The New Testament story begins with the statement, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David," (Matt. 1:1) and then proceeds to give the genealogy beginning with Abraham another great man in the Biblical story.

What grander testimony can one receive of the role played in life than what was ascribed to David? Matthew could have called him the son of Adam, Noah, Abraham or any other in the succession of his genealogy, but no, it was David who was given this distinction. This distinction was not a testimony to the perfection of the man David, but rather, to the sort of heart and soul this man possessed and the resultant covenant that God made with him. It has been said that God's great love for David was because he was so good at repenting. Despite God's great love for David, and his ability to repent, David still experienced the judgment of God for his wrongdoing. As I have written in other writings, there is always a consequence when one sins. David didn't lose his position in God's plan because he sinned, but he did experience consequences. As a result of his sin with Bathsheba, and the murder of her husband, the sword never left the family of David.

The Story of the Gospel according to David is therefore, a story of both his role in God's plan foreshadowing the ministry of Jesus to humanity, and his personal partaking of the benefits of the

redemptive work of Jesus Christ. One day as Jesus was having words with the Teachers of the Law, he asked them this question, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."' If David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" (Luke 20:41-44) This was to demonstrate to the Teachers of the Law that Jesus was indeed God incarnate, that though he was David's son, he was also David's God. He was David's God before he was David's son; this is the mystery of the incarnation.

David, like Mary who was the mother of the body of the Lord Jesus, needed the same redemptive work that all humanity needs. She and David were both of Adam's fallen race and therefore in need of the same salvation as all people. Mary gave this testimony by the Holy Spirit when she met Elizabeth her cousin, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," (Luke 1:46-47) thus she testified to her own need for the Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Chapter One

Three Kings of Israel

The era of the kings of Israel came after the nation returned to their land from Egypt and had settled into living in the land under various leaders called judges. The last of these leaders was the prophet/judge Samuel.

Saul, David and Salomon were the first three kings of Israel. Each of these men were characters in the drama that God uses in his word to demonstrate three realities concerning the nature of man and the redemptive plan of God.

Saul, the first King of Israel

Saul, the first King of Israel, was a king like all other nations had, that is, he answered to the philosophy of natural man concerning what made a good king. He therefore portrayed the realm called "flesh" in his relationship to his kingship and the people he served. (Flesh, as used in the New Testament means the realm of the fallen nature and this temporal and material realm, as we now know it.)

The nation of Israel became restless with their form of government and wanted a king like other nations had. Leading up to this time the nation was governed by people called judges who were individuals that God raised-up for special purposes and represented God to the people. God was in effect their king and they were his people. The judges led them into battle and during peace did what judges of our day do, listened to the disputes of the people and rendered judgments. In some cases they were also prophets. Samuel was one of these individuals and was the last of the judges. Among other things that he did as a leader of the people and a prophet of God, he anointed Saul as their first king. Later God rejected Saul as the father of a dynasty of kings and Samuel anointed David to be his successor.

Saul was not a bad king, as kings go, but he failed to please the Lord. Saul's problem seemed to be in his ability to take orders. There was a fundamental reason for this that went to the very heart and soul of the man. It was best-expressed one day when he spoke of God as being Samuel's God. Had he loved and served God on a personal level, he would not have made that statement. Saul believed in God, but when push came to shove, he did what he wanted to do, not what God wanted done. The seed of rebellion was alive and well in the heart of king Saul. It

wasn't that he was an idol worshipper nor did he overtly reject God, he just didn't make him his God in the very real sense.

He was a symbol of a whole class of humanity who are Christian enough to be called a Christian, but not enough to be a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led Christian. Today we would call him a carnal Christian, though he wasn't a Christian because Christ hadn't come yet.

Saul was an imposing figure of a man standing head and shoulders above all the men of Israel. In the beginning he was a timid man and hid among the baggage when Samuel called the nation together to present him to them as their king. Nevertheless, God was with Saul and changed his heart to the heart of a king. He also empowered him to prophecy when he was among the prophets. He was valiant in battle and led the nation in many victories over their enemies.

Despite all the right characteristics that Saul demonstrated, he had a fatal flaw; he always wanted to look right in the eyes of Israel. He cared more for pleasing the people than he did about pleasing the Lord. He, therefore, rationalized his behavior and tried to please the people and the Lord, even if that meant compromising. He expected God to understand, and approve of his actions, but God wanted a leader who was committed to pleasing him and one who would sanctify the Lord in the eyes of the people. This was the sort of man God found in David.

David the Warrior

David, the second King of Israel, was a man with a heart after God. His role in the drama being played out in type and shadow was that of the conqueror of the enemies to the soul of man. Because Saul's portrayal was of the flesh nature of man, no matter how hard he tried he always came up short of pleasing God because it is impossible for the fallen nature of man to ever please the Lord. We are taught in the New Testament that the fallen nature must be deemed dead, turned away from, and the new nature of Jesus Christ must be allowed to live in us. What we find is that once the new nature is born, the struggle between the old nature and the new nature begins. So it was in the drama portrayed by these two men. Once God rejected Saul and Samuel anointed David to be his successor, the struggle began. Saul's rejection of obedience to the commands of God led him along a path of misery.

The fallen nature of man is described in the book of Revelations under the name of the city, Babylon. Though it is not stated that it is the fallen nature being described, it is evident from the description that it is exactly what it is. First we see a harlot woman (apostate religion) riding on the back of a beast, (the anti-Christ government), and then we see a city being described (the fallen nature of man and his natural nature.) The nature is described as one would describe a city; we note that it is first the habitation of demons, and every fowl and unclean bird (the evil thoughts and imaginations of the mind.) Not only do we see the woman riding on the back of the beast, but also the act of riding is showing the agreement of the two. The nature of man is to be a God worshipper, therefore the anti-Christ spirit must allow for the expression of that nature and the apostate religions are well suited to his purposes. Thus we see the fallen nature as religious, demonized, full of unclean thoughts and desires, symbolized by the unclean and detestable birds. (Birds represent those thoughts and imaginations that occupy the mind and heart of man. These become corrupt when a person is under the influence of evil spirits that occupy this realm of evil.) The description then goes on and describes the insatiable desire for wealth and grandeur so characteristic of the fallen nature of man. Not only does this nature desire the finest the earth can provide, but also it wants to be served, therefore it seeks to enslave the hearts and souls of men. (See Revelation chapters 17-18)

So it was that Saul, once rejected by God, became demonized. An evil spirit was allowed by God to torment him. It was during these episodes that David was brought into the presence of the King to play music because he was a musician. When David was allowed to manifest his gift of

music, Saul was comforted. (I find it interesting that the fallen nature often finds comfort when around a worshipping soul.)

We are spirit, soul and body. These three are capable of being tormented by the presence of alien spirits of evil. We were not created to accommodate sin; evil was imposed upon us at the fall. This is why there is so much stress in the world today. God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a garden. There were no enemies to their comfort. They didn't even need clothing to hide their shame, because there was no shame, they were innocent of evil. God gave them full accommodation for their ability to appreciate beauty making a glorious garden with rivers and fruit trees, gold, aromatic resin and onyx. All was at peace until Satan came as a serpent tempting Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Experiencing evil is not necessary to the happiness of man. That idea is a lie. The temptation to "sow some wild oats" is a cunning deception from the same old serpent that tempted Eve.

The body that was created to serve the soul and spirit of man is the lowest part of man, and is the most compatible part to be occupied by Satan and demons. Satan was able to corrupt this lower nature much like a disease corrupts. I suppose this is the reason that the fallen nature is referred to as flesh. God's original intention was that the body be a temple, and the perversion of that intention has brought judgment upon our bodies. (Diseases were put upon man as a result of sin. See Exodus 15:26). The natural body of man provides the instrumentation for the fallen nature to express itself. The resultant corrupted nature (the fallen nature or sin nature) is cursed and must die and our bodies restored to the status of a temple and transformed into the likeness of Christ's body at his return.

Another typological snapshot is found in Genesis 9:24-27,

"When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.'

He also said, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.'"

When Noah uttered these words, he was speaking a prophetic word that was also symbolic of the relationship of the body to the soul and spirit. What had happened in the previous verses was, Noah, after the floodwaters had receded, and upon coming out of the ark had planted a vineyard and when the harvest came in, had made some wine. He drank and became drunk and while he was asleep in his tent his son Ham discovered he was lying there naked. He then told his brothers who took a blanket and walked backwards into the tent and covered him.

When Noah awoke from his wine and realized what had happened he uttered the above words. If we assign the significance of Ham as representing the body, and Canaan his son the offspring of his body, and Japheth the role of representing the soul, then Shem would represent the spirit of man. The way this would play out then would be that Noah, instead of cursing Ham the original offender representing the natural body of man, cursed his offspring, Canaan, who would then represent the fallen nature. We then have Shem representing the spirit who is the recipient of the divine call and through whom Christ would come. We then have Japheth who would represent the soul who is permitted to live in the tent of Shem, thus in the picture he is blessed by his association with Shem. Canaan was the father of the Canaanites who eventually had to be driven out of the Promised Land. This is a picture of how the fallen nature must be deemed dead, driven out of the land of our soul if we are to live in peace in the tent of the Spirit. The spirit is our inmost dwelling place where the presence of God enters and takes up permanent residence once we have received Jesus. The soul, represented by Japheth is permitted to dwell under this covering and the body instead of being the habitation of evil is now a temple of the Holy Spirit. The body is not the evil thing; it is the offspring, the fallen nature that is the problem.

David's role was showing how the enemies of our soul must be conquered. There is no legitimate place for the fallen nature within the borders of the soul. In the proper relationship of the perfected Christian we see the spirit as being filled with the Holy Spirit, who controls the soul; that controls the body; thus, the scripture says, "spirit, soul and body." (1Thes. 5:23)

The Spirit is where the blessing dwells. The soul is the beneficiary of the blessing, and the body is the servant.

There is a sense in which Israel was a type of natural man, Saul a type of the fallen nature, (The wrong king in charge.) and David a type of Christ the warrior king. Solomon was then a type of Christ in his coming glory as he is united with his bride in the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

It is somewhat hard to see Solomon in this role since he was less than perfect, but if we discount that aspect of his life, we can see that the role he played was full of the wisdom and blessing of God.

When Jesus came in his first coming as Christ the Savior, he came to redeem the souls of humanity. In his life he demonstrated how the enemies of our soul are overcome, and our bodies healed and delivered. He then went to the cross where he paid the penalty of our sins and secured the legal right to our salvation and deliverance.

There is a parallel to what is happening in the spiritual realm in our lives, and what happened in the natural realm in the lives of these kings.

The struggle that existed between Saul and David is struggles many people are experiencing in their daily lives because they wanted a worldly king to rule their lives. He was given power over them, but Christ is also within as a result of their faith in him, and a change of authority must take place before peace can enter their lives. The transition from being ruled by the flesh to being ruled by the Spirit happens as a result of the work of God and must not be hastened or harm will come to the plan of God. David had to bide his time and wait for God to bring Saul to his end, then he could come in and cleanse the land of its enemies. So it is that Satan's rule must be brought to an end in our lives. It happens when we are through with sin, when we are sick of it and upon repenting, turn to our rightful king, Jesus.

Solomon the King of Glory

There was no greater king in the manifestation of the wisdom and glory of God in the nation of Israel and perhaps the world. God gave Solomon a gift of wisdom that he used to govern the nation and to achieve peace with unparalleled prosperity for the nation. David typified Christ in his first coming, as he was the warrior king against the enemies of the souls of man, and continuing through the Church age. The most important achievement for Solomon was the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. David, however, provided the plan and the materials for the temple.

Solomon built a beautiful temple and also a marvelous palace and cities in the nation. He gathered gold, silver and exotic birds and animals. He had horses and chariots and shields made of gold. Gold was so plentiful in the city of Jerusalem that even their plates were made of gold. Silver was considered to be of little value in the nation of Israel at that time.

The Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon and to see the wonders of his kingdom, bringing gifts of wealth to him. She had heard the stories about this wise king and wanted to see him for herself. When she came and saw how he conducted everyday life in the capital city, and heard the words of wisdom coming from Solomon's lips, she declared that she had not heard of the half of it!

What is yet in store for the people of God has not yet been fully manifest. What the world saw in Jesus in his first coming was only a hint of what is yet to come. What has been happening in the last two thousand years of human history has to do with the preparations for the temple of God that will be assembled at his Second Coming. At that time the holy temple that consists of living stones (Christians who have put their faith in Jesus) will be manifest for the first time. All

through this age of the Church, the Holy Spirit has been gathering people from every nation, tribe and tongue to be a part of the eternal habitation of the living God. The true temple, foreshadowed by the one built by Solomon, is made of people, not stones. We are the gems and precious metals that make the true temple city of God.

Solomon gathered his bride from the nations around him. I suppose this is a somewhat controversial subject, but Solomon was foreshadowing the age of the church and the bride of Christ that comes from all the people of the earth. Where he went wrong was in seeking to accommodate the false religions of the women he married. This compromise would later lead to the division of the nation of Israel.

God sent a word to Jeroboam saying that he was to receive ten of the tribes of Israel after the reign of Solomon. Thus, God judged the nation because of the idolatry of Solomon.

Human vessels are imperfect and even typological lessons can be marred by the imperfections of the actors on the stage of life. Nevertheless, the message of God is manifest for the entire world to see. Human weakness and failure is part of the message, this is why Jesus came. We lack the Spirit of Life and Jesus came to pay the penalty of our sins. Having accomplished his redemptive work on the cross, the way was made for the Holy Spirit to come and enter the hearts of men and bring to them the Spirit of Life that had been lost in the Garden of Eden so many years previous. We are now the living stones that make up the temple of God and are being hewn to the specifications of the master builder, the Lord Christ Jesus.

Chapter Two

David is Anointed King

When God sent Samuel the prophet to Jesse's house to anoint Saul's successor, Saul had already been rejected by God to be the king of Israel. Samuel had misgivings about going because he was afraid that Saul would kill him, but God told him to take a heifer with him and say that he had come to sacrifice to the Lord. He was then to invite Jesse to the sacrifice. While there the Lord would show him what to do. The men of Bethlehem were afraid when they saw Samuel and asked if he came in peace. He assured them that he had and that he was going to make a sacrifice to the Lord and invited them. He then specifically invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice.

As Samuel arrived at the house of Jesse, a problem soon became evident. Jesse had eight sons! Which one should he anoint?

The first son Samuel saw was Eliab the eldest (Eliab means almighty father) and he looked very much like a king. Samuel thought,

“Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.”

But the Lord spoke to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things that man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:6-7)

Next, Jesse called Abinadab (Abinadab means generosity), but God rejected him as well.

Then Jesse brought Shammah before Samuel (Shammah has two possible meanings, the most common was ruin, desolation, consternation, or waste. A more obscure meaning, however, was wonderful thing probably the intended meaning in this context), but God also rejected him.

And so it went until seven sons passed before Samuel, each receiving the same rejection. Samuel then turned to Jesse and asked if he had any other sons. Jesse replied,

“There is still the youngest, but he is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

“So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with fine appearance and handsome features.” Then the Lord said, “Rise anoint him; he is the one.” (1 Sam. 16:11-12)

Now, let’s look at what we have here. We have eight possible candidates for king. All of them are of the same lineage. Any one of them could have been selected to carry the promise of the coming Christ.

There is, however, a special use of numbers here that is note worthy.

First, I notice the number of sons. Jesse had eight. The number eight is used symbolically in the scriptures. It was on the eighth day of a male baby’s life that circumcision was done. The first day of a week was some times referred to as the eight day of the week, when it followed a Sabbath week of purification. In that case, it symbolized a new beginning.

There was no doubt many families in the history of Israel who had eight boys. That fact in itself is not significant. It is only significant when it is connected to an important sequence in the Biblical story.

We also have another number in this story, the number four. The most common way the number four is used seems to be in connection with government or governments.

There are, however, instances in the scripture where the number four is used in a rather unique way. The book of Proverbs contains a good example. In chapter thirty the sayings of Agur are given. Beginning in verse fifteen and continuing through verse thirty, he gives groups of things or ideas. He says, “There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say enough.” In this passage there are several such groupings, and in each case “the three” are used to set the stage for the primary subject, the fourth.

This is what I see in this story of the anointing of David to be king.

Now let’s look again at what we have here. If the meaning of names can teach us anything, then we should take special note.

The first three sons are each candidates for king.

The first son to pass before Samuel is Eliab. His name suggests a great quality for kingship; it means, “almighty father.” If his name suggests what qualities we might expect from him, then, this man would be a very strong candidate. Strength and wisdom, combined with the physical attraction mentioned, would make him a candidate of choice.

The second son to pass before Samuel was Abinadab. His name means generosity. His platform for election to be anointed King would be his “share the wealth program.” Such a candidate is always hard to beat since generosity is a very popular characteristic.

Surely one of those first two would be the one! But wait! Don’t count Shammah out! He’s the “Wow” guy! Mister Right. You know the type; he always says what everyone wants to hear. He knows how to dress, he’s good looking, and charm seems to drip from him like honey from an overfilled honeycomb. This guy has class.

Now, surely one of these would be God’s choice. But no, God did not choose these men, or any of the following four. Who then would be king? These men were all born with kingly qualities.

Poor Samuel; he must have begun to wonder if he was really hearing God by now. Did God send him? If so, was he hearing God right? Or, did God know what he was doing?

Finally Samuel spoke to Jesse and asked him if he had any more sons. ““Yes, the youngest, but he is a shepherd boy.’ ‘Send for him, we will not sit down until he arrives’”. (1 Samuel 16:11) When David arrived, the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; he is the one.” (1 Sam. 16:12]

In this story we see our hearts laid bare. We see the contrast between what we value and what God values. As we look at Eliab’s appeal we are reminded of what John said about the lust of the eye. Eliab looked so strong and handsome. We see Abinadab’s appeal to the lust of the flesh; how nice it would be to get something for nothing. And then there is Shammah appealing to the pride of life. These things, said John, are not of the Father, but of the world. (1 John 2:16)

But whose choice would David be? What appeal would he have? What kind of King would a shepherd boy make?

His appeal was not to man, but to God! He had a heart after God’s own heart! He loved God. He understood God. He often spoke for God; and when he sinned, he knew how to repent! It was David who said,

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps. 51:7-10)

This was the man God wanted to be king! From him, God would give a Son, a Son who would bring back to man the means of access to the Father, a Son in whom life would exist, and that “life” would be the light of the world.

What sort of king do we look for today? How do we see Jesus?

Do we see him as an Eliab, one who always has an answer to our problems; one to hold us when we hurt; and to protect us when we’re in danger?

Or do we see him as an Abinadab, who can feed us when we’re hungry, clothe us and bless us?

Do we see Jesus as a Shammah, one who dazzles us with his glory?

I’m convinced that he does all those things, but that’s not the kind of king he is. Jesus is the king of the Kingdom of Heaven. This kingdom does not answer to the natural cry of man. This kingdom answers to the heart of God!

To enter it requires change. We cannot dictate its form or style. And yes, we can miss out on this kingdom. If our heart seeks an Eliab, Abinadab or a Shammah, we will never have Jesus as our King! Even though he is everything they represent, seeking him for those reasons will ultimately separate us from him! This kingdom requires a pure love of God as the motivating factor in our quest. We enter because we love the king, not because we love what he does!

The Messages of the Psalms

Chapter Three

The Prediction of the Coronation of King Jesus

Psalms 1

The Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is based on the willingness of a human heart to enthrone him. Thus, Psalms chapter one portrays the blessedness of the man who has turned to the Lord in a total sense. He no longer sits in the seat of the mockers but rather delights in the law of the LORD. He meditates on the revelation of the heart of God, the Law, and reaps the harvest of blessing. Whereas there is a promise of blessing on the righteous, there is also a promise that the wicked will not stand on the Day of Judgment or be permitted into the congregation of the righteous.

I once read a sermon about the city New Jerusalem and about the foundations of the city. The writer commented on the top layer of precious stones of the foundations of the city that it being amethyst is a reminder of the promise that no drunkard will be permitted into the city. This, he said, speaks comfort to all who have been victims of alcoholics as amethyst is known historically as the stone of sobriety. Likewise, this Psalm proclaims a similar message of comfort to all that have suffered at the hand of evil people. When we all gather in our heavenly home, evil will be absent there—not even a trace of the torments of the past will remain. Wickedness will have perished and God will watch over the way of the righteous.

God is into purity of heart and spirit. He is the God of the positive. He is love and love is full of life. Every expression of life and health are manifestations of his nature.

Evil is contrary to the very fiber of his being. Evil is empty of life and therefore empty of everything that is beautiful, joyful and loving. One author said that evil is live spelled backwards! It is harsh, selfish, shallow, and cares nothing for pain, harm, or losses. It is purely temporal in scope caring nothing about eternal implications. Evil is full of the poison of death and ultimately leads to death of the body, soul and spirit of man.

In Psalms chapter one we are told,

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Mockers of Biblical authority dominate our current public educational system, so when we send our children to school we are subjecting them to the teachings and wisdom of the world that has become increasingly hostile to our faith.

The underlying problem is in their rejection of God as both the supreme authority in all matters of life, and as the creator of all. They have separated education into secular or religious. To make education purely secular is a blatant denial of God. This statement is true because God being creator of everything must therefore be recognized in everything or it is a lie. To say that anything can exist without acknowledging that it is a creation of God is a blatant lie!

These scoffers are in charge of most, if not all, the curriculum that is currently being taught to our children! Even subjects that teach simple truth such as mathematics should teach in reference to the fact that math is true because God is the creator of it. Our current systems of math are based on realities that are true because God made everything with math as a vital part of it! To

say that math is secular and God is a religious concept is totally a statement of mockers and what can be termed part of The Great Lie.

When parents are unable to send their children to an educational system that has God as the underlying foundation, they have a responsibility to counter the fallacies their children are being taught. Much of what is being taught is fundamentally correct; the problem is with the underlying equation. Taking the acknowledgement of God out of the equation of why a truth is true is a subtle denial of his place. When God was acknowledged in public thought as being the supreme authority and creator of all, this wasn't as essential to point out, but now that atheism is dominant either subtly or blatantly, we cannot assume that children understand this point. This is important because our concept of God ultimately determines everything about our values, and is the underlying principle that guides the development of our very personhood. Without an accurate understanding of God we are like a ship traveling without a compass or perhaps even a ruder!

The Coronation of Jesus

Psalms 2

God is love; therefore, he gave Jesus to the world with a message of hope and to be their true king. Many governments of the earth have presumed to take authority that belongs only to God and their day of doom is coming. They, however, resist that inevitability as is described in Psalms 2. What is described here in this Psalm was played out the day of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Here are the words of the prophet David.

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Ps. 2:1-12)

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah saw scenes in vision of the heavenly kingdom and the wonder of it defies the mind to grasp or picture. One thing is clear, what was seen was otherworldly in nature and awesome beyond description. The mind of man never has been able to comprehend the glory and the power of almighty God; nor have we been able to see this correlated to the Father who intimately loves his children, full of compassion bringing healing to our wounded hearts and bodies, as portrayed by Jesus. How can we relate to the awesome power that can speak worlds into existence, and at the same time speak words of love, compassion, and healing to the tenderest among us?

David the prophet spoke by the Holy Spirit and declared, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs" and whom did he laugh at? It was the ones who plotted and conspired against him, who opposed the anointed one, (Christ, the Messiah). It was an effort to silence the voice of Christ because he was a threat to the status quo of the nation of Israel. They saw themselves as too weak to stand against the mighty Roman government with whom they had an arrangement of peaceful co-existence with the rulers over them. Allowing Jesus to continue his ministry was viewed as a threat to their political well-being and indeed the very existence of the nation. Therefore they conspired against him to bring him down. Their conclusion was that he must die or they would all die.

The first response of God to the people of Israel who were rising up against Christ was to laugh at them. How foolish man is to try to argue with God! God will do what he will do and any effort to try to stop him is utterly futile. Jesus would be crowned their king that day and all their efforts would be part of the process. God loves to take the folly of man and use it to bring glory to his name. All the pain, the abuse, the rejection and the mockery were parts of the redemptive plan of God! God took their wicked plot and made it a grand coronation of Jesus who would not only be their king but King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

They thought they mocked him that day, but he who sits in heaven laughed at their folly. They wove a crown of thorns thinking they mocked him, but that was the very crown that would stand above all other crowns because it was symbolic of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus. What characterized the kingdom of Jesus was the wisdom of the thornbush that was expressed in the story that Gideon's son told when the leadership of the nation was at issue. After the death of Gideon, Abimelech, Gideon's son of a slave girl, had murdered seventy of his brothers all sons of Gideon, only Jotham the youngest survived, and by this action become king over Shechem. Jotham then challenged his right to do this speaking this parable to the men of Shechem.

“One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, ‘Be our king.’
But the olive tree answered, ‘Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold way over the trees?’

“Next, the trees said to the fig tree, ‘Come and be our king.’
“But the fig tree replied, ‘Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?’

“Then the trees said to the vine, ‘Come and be our king.’
“But the vine answered, ‘Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?’

“Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘Come and be our king.’
“The thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!’
(Judges 9:8-15)

The wisdom of the thornbush in summary was that the first three all thought they would have to reign according to the wisdom of the world concerning kings. The wisdom of the world says that kings must rule by wisdom, strength or wit because all men are rebels and must be led by one that is stronger.

The wisdom of the thornbush says, I will be your king but I will remain a lowly thorn bush; you must change and humble yourselves under my shadow or let fire come out of the bush and consume the great trees of the forest.

Jesus didn't come to show himself stronger or wiser than other kings. He never displayed power or pride as kings usually do, but rather was born in a stable and rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's back. Jesus displayed the loving heart of God to us by healing the sick and freeing men of demonic torment. He taught about a kingdom that is pure and holy that lives in the hearts of righteous men. He need not rule by force because the subjects of his kingdom are ruled by love. All who can't be ruled in this way will be judged by fire.

Jesus wore a crown of thorns the day he was crucified. Wicked men wove it and shoved it into his scalp in defiance and mockery: but, no other crown would do for the Lord Jesus Christ. It was only the flesh of Jesus that felt the pain caused by this crown, the flesh that must die for the sins of humanity, so that all who will come to him might be freed from the power of the flesh. As we come to the Lord who wore the crown, and humble ourselves before him, the power of the fallen nature is broken.

It is pride and rebellion that is the power of sin and coming to the one who wore the crown of thorns and putting our trust in him is an act that breaks that power.

They thought they mocked him as they placed the crown upon his brow, but no, they were crowning him king and because of what he did he became King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus Christ submitted to this coronation and every part of it spoke of the nature of the kingdom he was being crowned to rule over. God was orchestrating this glorious coronation of his Son Jesus.

He was crowned to rule over all who come to this kingdom. The crown, the robe, the reed given as his scepter, and the cross that became the symbol of his throne, all spoke eloquently of the form of government of the Kingdom of Heaven.

They thought they mocked him but God took every action and transformed it into a testimony of his great wisdom and love for mankind. And yes, Jesus is still the same loving, approachable Christ who heals our bodies and liberates our spirits of all the enemies that have held us captive, just like he did before his coronation. And, by the way, there are no policemen in heaven; all rebels are outside the city. No evil thing can enter; therefore, all the inhabitants are at peace.

Chapter Four

God Fights for His People

As we come to the third Psalm we see a picture of how the people of God are to behave in the face of danger. David had been a great king but as he was getting older one of his sons tried to capture his throne from him. Absalom began to circumvent David's authority by seducing the people to seek his counsel instead of David's. He would position himself in a place where people who needed the king would pass and intercept them and settle their business there. After awhile he gained more and more favor with the people and then conspired to take the throne away from David his father. When David learned what was happening he had to take a stand against Absalom and a bitter battle resulted. David was vindicated and Joab the general of David's army killed Absalom. It was at this time that David wrote Psalm 3.

Psalm 3

A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom.

O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." Selah But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. Selah I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. Selah

Even though David deplored what Absalom was doing, he still loved him as his son. He had ordered that Absalom be dealt with kindly, but Joab wouldn't hear it. After word of Absalom's death reached the ears of David, David mourned for his son. He wished that it had been he rather than Absalom that had died, yet because of the principle of righteousness, David had to stand against him. Though David dispatched his army against him, his trust was in the Lord. He knew the Lord would direct the outcome of the battle. The strength of David had always been his faith in the Lord and just because he was older, he was no less God's anointed.

Those who are a part of the kingdom of Jesus are under the care and protection of the Lord. We can trust in him and indeed, must trust in him. To do less is an act of either rebellion or idolatry.

What we trust in is a God to us and if we do not trust in God but rather in our own ability, we have placed our ability in the position of God, and therefore it is idolatry. For a person who has received Jesus to not trust in him, is like saying, “I want you to save me from hell but I don’t believe you can help me in life.” Isaiah 48:16-19 says, “Come near me and listen to this: From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there.’ And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit. This is what the LORD says — your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: **‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.** Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be cut off nor destroyed from before me.”

When we enter this great kingdom relationship with Jesus as king and Father God as our Father, we must learn to trust in the Lord. Learning to trust in the Lord means that we have to give up trusting in other means of gaining what we want. It also involves giving up wanting what we want, when what we want is contrary to what God wants for us. We must surrender our desires to God who we now understand has our interests in his heart. When we say to God, do what you think is best, we are saying we know his heart is with us and that we can trust his decision above our own. We understand that we have limited intellect, not knowing all the facts or what the future holds, but he knows, therefore, we can trust in him.

Understanding that God loves us is essential to real faith. Real faith doesn’t dictate to God but rather trusts his love and wisdom above its own. Real faith understands that there are no lapses in his loving care and that all we are asked to do is walk in attentiveness to his directives in our lives. Obedience to his will and instructions result in abundant blessings in our lives.

Those who have learned to look after the Lord’s house and the Lord’s kingdom find that he in turn begins to look after their house and their family and friends. Jesus taught that it is the same measure we use to measure out to others that is used to measure out to us. When we measure out to God, however, it is pressed down and running over when it is returned to us. (See Malachi 3, Luke 6:38)

Chapter Five

An Appeal for Answers to Prayer

Psalm 4

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of David.

Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Selah

Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD will hear when I call to him. In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD.

Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.

You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

In this Psalm we have an appeal to God concerning answers to prayer, then we have God's answer. "How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?" "Selah" (Selah probably means think on it.) (Ps. 4:2)

Apparently the nation of Israel was self-conscious about being different from the other nations. Instead of seeing serving the Lord as an advantage and blessing, they were embarrassed. They had allowed serving the Lord to be "demonized", as we would say today. Satan always works toward the goal of embarrassing God and his people. If he can cause the people of God to feel embarrassed about their faith, he has gained advantage over them. The expression God used in answer to David's question was that they had turned his glory into shame. They were more captivated by the delusions of the heathen and their God's than they were awestruck by the Lord God. This was the fundamental cause of their fascination with idolatry. Instead of holding the Lord God up as the one and only God and ridiculing all false God's, they allowed the heathen to ridicule them and their unseen God.

Next in Psalms 4, we have instructions from the teacher, David. His first point is that the Lord has set apart the Godly for himself and will hear him when he prays. Then he counsels them to not sin when angry, and to search their hearts when they are on their beds. Apparently there were those who were angry with God and disillusioned by the inaction of God on some issue in their lives. Anger is a dangerous though human emotion, since it can lead to violence and hate. It has the potential of evil in it whether directed toward God or man.

What we fantasize or dwell upon in our thoughts must be righteous in content. What comes to mind here is faithfulness of heart. If, for example, a man in business thinks about how he can increase profits, he should never think about how to defraud a customer. His contemplation or meditation concerning it should be "how can I give a better product or service, and thus increase profits through increased sales. When caught in a desperate situation, the question is never what lie can I tell, but rather how can I answer so the truth will be properly understood.

If a person is with a lover, his mind should be upon that lover and not another. In like manner, it is never appropriate to say we love God and to think about how we can commit an ungodly act. God is a holy God and his character is holy, if we are his people we too must be holy. When the meditations of our hearts are pure, he is attentive to us, and in the end, we will be greatly blessed.

In the arena of human emotions, there is a basic need in us to be loved. In the case of human sexual need, God's intention is that a man and woman be drawn to each other through hormonal attraction and finding compatibility based on matters of values, interests and opportunities, pursue the possibility of a more lasting relationship. Enduring and satisfying marriages result from keeping the person thus selected in the center of our affection base with all other interests, pleasures and enterprises revolving around that base. Whenever there is an emotional compartmentalizing taking place, the marriage is headed for trouble. It is possible and healthy for married people to have interests that don't involve each other, but they should never be to the exclusion of the married partner. Compartmentalizing is when a person excludes their partner from some area of their life or affections, making it off-limits to their spouse. It may be necessary to compartmentalize in the sense of not involving them for a legitimate reason, such as lack of interest, time, or strength to participate. In healthy relationships adjustments can be made without offense, but excluding someone for selfish or immoral reasons is a deathblow to intimacy.

Sharing all of what life is to us is a vital part of the marriage relationship. Marriage is parallel then to our relationship with the Lord. If we are guilty of duplicity in our human relationships, we will be vulnerable to duplicity with God. If we lack the ability to stay focused upon the Lord in our life, will also likely have difficulty staying focused upon our marriage partner. The ability to be faithful is a foundational stone of character, and those lacking it will tend to drift in other matters of life. Emotional honesty is the foundation upon which all good relationships are built. This is why idolatry is so offensive!

David had encountered people who were arguing that they had tried serving the Lord, but nothing good had come of it. They were like many of us who have prayed, paid tithe, attended church regularly and done all the right things, and there was still no evidence of God's pleasure upon them. The light of the Lord was not shining on them. Despairing they have turned away from the Lord and have served their own vain desires.

The Lord knows our hearts. We can't con God. If the reason we serve him is because we love him and want to please him, we will continue doing good. If our motive, on the other hand, is to get God on our side, he will know it and see through our hypocrisy, just as we can see through such motives in those around us.

The Lord desires people to want to know him. He desires to be the focus of our desire. When he is a desire among a crowd of desires, he is offended, just as we are in like circumstances. Why are people dissatisfied with their marriages? Is it not because they have found themselves isolated from the desire of their mate? Many excuses can be offered, but they are so like what Israel was saying about the Lord. God instructed Israel not to sin when on their beds, he said, "search your hearts and be silent." When we are lying upon our beds, it is common to think about things that either interest or concern us. It is in times like this that we need to be vigilant concerning the direction of our thoughts. We are to offer right sacrifices and to trust in the LORD.

Gifts and sacrifices are very closely related in meaning. Gifts that are not sacrifices are often inferior in nature. What God is wanting is called sacrifice, but for us to understand what God is trying to communicate, it might be helpful to think of gifts. God's purpose in wanting sacrifices is to draw us away from a casual relationship. He wants us to be passionate about our love and devotion to him.

When we feel disappointed in our relationship with the Lord for some reason, we are to give him a gift of love and trust. This is a conscious decision on our part, and an expression of true faith. There are times when we can't possibly see a reason for the silence or inaction of God in our behalf. We cry, pray and agonize, but to no avail. What are we to do? Believe in him! Believe in his love, character, and constant care, knowing that God sees what we don't see. It is in times like this that Satan always seems to be close at hand to accuse God. That is why we must be strong in faith in God. Those arrows of accusation are very real and strong, but the shield of faith is stronger when used. Delays in answers don't mean that God doesn't care.

Have you ever been in a circumstance when you were waiting for someone and it seemed like they would never come? They were supposed to meet you, but the time has come and gone, and minutes have stretched into hours, perhaps days, or even months or years. What are we to think? Why didn't they come to us? We are faced with a decision, are we going to feel abandoned, rejected, ignored, or was there some very legitimate reason. Did they just forget, or was there a reason beyond their control?

When my wife and I were first married, I worked as a carpenter. If I was late getting home, my wife was a basket case when I arrived. She was sure something awful had happened. There were times when I had to stay on the job late, usually when we were pouring concrete, a common occurrence in those days. It wasn't possible to leave the job until it was finished, and calling home wasn't possible either. This called for an adjustment in my wife's thinking. She had to learn to trust God and me that everything was okay, despite the fact she would have preferred that

it be otherwise. Giving me a gift of love and trust was all that was needed to make my homecoming a peaceful and happy occasion.

In our relationship with the Lord there are times when we need to just leave matters in the hands of God and understand that he loves us, and that there are reasons for his silence or delay. Thus, he admonishes us not to sin against him by doubting his love. Instead of fretting, we should remind ourselves that he is always righteous in everything he does and rejoice in the goodness of the Lord. If we believe in the integrity of the Lord, we will be able to maintain peace.

Thus, David concludes his Psalm with a confession of the blessing of joy that was of greater value to him than the blessing of increased provisions sought by the faint hearted. When he lay down at night he had peace in his heart and mind knowing that God was his protector.

All who serve the Lord with gladness know that what David said is true. It doesn't take things to give us joy, it is the knowledge that all is well between God and us. The apostle Paul remarked that he had learned to be content in whatever state or situation he found himself, and this had nothing to do with possessions or personal comfort.

What do we value in our lives? If it is of this world it can be taken away by the world. If it is heavenly in nature, the more the world tries to take it, the greater it becomes!

Chapter Six

The Lord's Attentiveness to the Prayers of the Righteous

Psalm 5

For the director of music. For flutes. A psalm of David.

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.

But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple. Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies — make straight your way before me. Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit. Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

Those who are in proper relationship to the Lordship of Jesus, who recognize the Fatherhood of God, have a very special privilege, prayer. When our life is deemed to be righteous, the Lord is attentive to our prayers

David came before the Lord sighing from the weight of what was on his heart. David must have been experiencing difficulty in his administration. This sort of thing happens in homes, churches, businesses and governments. People can be ever so nice while in your presence, yet

secretly hating you. He cried unto the Lord knowing that God would hear him. He began his day with the Lord and had absolute confidence that God heard him when he prayed. He also knew that he was not alone in his distress, that God also hated wickedness.

Whatever we experience in life, we can take comfort in knowing we are not alone. Others have also experienced hardships of life ahead of us. David needed God to fight for him. If he was going to remain king, he needed God to be with him. In those days kings always lived with the threat of a possible attempt to overthrow them. It wasn't unusual for kings to be assassinated by some rival political entity. David was no doubt aware of some conspiracy within his government that was deeply troubling him. We too, need God to watch over us if we are to live in safety, peace and have joy in our lives. We need God's constant attentiveness to our every thought, action and desire. When we need correction, we need him to be there for us.

David rehearsed what he knew about God's character, that he is a God who takes no pleasure in evil and will not abide wickedness. He wanted to be sure that when he entered the Lord's presence he was not doing so arrogantly, but rather, with the greatest sense of reverence for the Lord.

Knowing the character of God causes us to examine our own hearts to see if there is any wicked or deceitful way in us. Are we plotting the overthrow of some authority in our lives? If so, why? Is it because we are victims of evil, or is it because we covet what is not ours? If we are full of selfish ambition, we will see others more successful than ourselves, as either an obstruction to our success, or as a reminder of our failure to achieve. In either case, we resent them and what they represent. Jealousy has at its core self-love. Self-love wants to grab what it sees as its own and isolate it lest it be taken from us.

The situation of David was not so much that he was afraid of losing his place of power, but rather, losing the sense of wholesomeness within his kingdom. I can identify with this as pastor of a church. If there is discontent within the membership, what is lost is the wholesomeness of the congregation. The purity of undivided love and unity of spirit are conditions that bring a joyful assembly of God's people. When there is strife, envy and jealousy at work in the hearts of people, joy is lost. Truly it is said that, the joy of the Lord is our strength.

God will not protect the wicked; therefore, it is important to always act righteously. God takes pleasure in righteousness and will protect the righteous as with a shield.

Chapter Seven

Grace for the Living

Psalm 6

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. According to sheminith. A psalm of David.

O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long? Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; **save me because of your unfailing love.**

No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes. Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping. The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer. All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed; they will turn back in sudden disgrace.

Failure is an experience common to all people. So long as we live in this body of death we are subject to human failure. It would be nice to achieve perfection so that we would never have to regret some slipup, some momentary eruption of unwanted desire or out of control emotion, thought or deed. We may be ever so dedicated to the principles of the Holy Spirit, full of love for the Lord, but something comes along that is contrary to what we stand for, blindsiding us so to speak, and yuck! David was one who experienced such moments; therefore he wrote in this Psalm, "O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long? Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; **save me because of your unfailing love.**"

There is a point where we learn to draw upon the grace of God for overcoming power. Some individuals walk in the Spirit almost perfectly, but the fallen nature is not dead so long as we live in this body; it is only deemed to be dead. That means, it is treated as if it is dead. We are told that we are under no obligation to what that nature wants or desires. We need not listen to its cries, or give it anything to feed upon. The less we yield to the fleshly nature, the weaker it becomes. We must be vigilant, however, never assuming that we are beyond reverting to some previous fault. Not only do we struggle against the threat of a fallen nature that is looking for an opportunity to resuscitate, but we have external threats as well.

Human strength comes to an end and weariness overtakes all who struggle because of evildoers. Being righteous comes with a price; it requires that even retaliation be committed to God. No matter how bad it hurts, we are not to exercise vengeance, for vengeance belongs to the Lord.

Everyone who crosses the line into vengeance is committing a violation against the principle of righteousness. Carrying bitterness and hate brings anguish upon the soul and produces death. What are we to do when evil presses upon us from every side?

All have sinned and have fallen short of the Glory of God; therefore, the truly repentant of heart cry for mercy when they come to the Lord. What we cry for is not the pain of discipline, but rather the power of healing.

Sin is a symptom of the sickness of spiritual death that resides in the hearts of all people who are a part of this present world. Only those who have been born again have the power of the life of Jesus residing in them. The power of sin comes from the death that is in the heart of fallen man.

Just as an insect experiences metamorphosis to change from a worm to a flying insect, so we are experiencing a spiritual metamorphosis in which we are being changed from being a person of the world to a spiritually motivated being that is now found to be in Christ. The struggles we experience are the result of our physical bodies having needs that have previously been met through sinful means. We acquired desires for what is spiritually forbidden while living in sin and now we seek to be healed and restored in our inner man. There is a time for the pain of correction, and there is a time when what is needed is a revelation of true righteousness. In the process of change (spiritual metamorphosis), some of what happens is an abandonment of some evil, and at other times, it is the revelation of a spiritual principle that is needed.

Because we are imperfect beings, we must be patient with those who struggle around us. We dare not act harshly against the evil deeds in a person who is struggling to be freed from the flesh, but rather, to assist them in their struggle against sin. Since we need mercy we must be careful to show mercy. This doesn't mean that we condone sin, but it does mean that we must be careful about how we go about seeking to bring correction.

Evil hurts, and tears are a response to the pain. Jesus himself was acquainted with grief, not the grief of self-pity, but the pain of having to endure the constant opposition from those who should have loved him. John said, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:11) Judaism was the religion that had been established as the official religion of Almighty God, but when Jesus (God with us) appeared, they rejected him.

Today, we who serve the Lord are called dear children, God is our Father, yet the world sees us as inferior, weak and narrow minded, people who must be tolerated. Every effort to convince the world of righteousness is met with suspicion and resentment. "Don't preach to me, or keep your beliefs to yourself," is their response to us when in love we try to share with them. Those who do evil love the darkness of ignorance. When they are confronted with their sin they want to retaliate. They would rather kill the prophet than to accept the truth about their own wicked heart. This condition of rejection is not new to the human experience; David felt the full weight of it and needed God to deliver him lest he die from the pain of it.

Like Lot of old, we whose tents are pitched near the Sodoms of our modern times, are grieved continually. Unlike Lot who chose to dwell in Sodom because of his lust for an easy life; many of us have no choice in the matter. Sodom is everywhere, in our cities, on our televisions, in newsprint, and even in the sanctity of our churches! The sin of Sodom was not only sexual perversion but was primarily pride!

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen." (Ezekiel 16:49-50)

Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones tremble. I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD and his holy words. The land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land lies parched and the pastures in the desert are withered. The prophets follow an evil course and use their power unjustly. "Both prophet and priest are godless; even in my temple I find their wickedness," declares the LORD. "Therefore their path will become slippery; they will be banished to darkness and there they will fall. I will bring disaster on them in the year they are punished," declares the LORD. "Among the prophets of Samaria I saw this repulsive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah." (Jeremiah 23:9-14)

Though these passages were addressed to Israel (Samaria) and Judah, the two nations that had originally been Israel, the term Sodom was applied to them for a number of reasons. Perversion, in simple definition, is anything that is contrary to what God intended. It is applied to conditions of heart that are also called hardness of heart. It is applied to religious practices that are not being carried out for the divinely ordained purpose. It is applied to all sexual deviancies whether, homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual, any sexual activity that is outside the sanctity of God ordained marriage.

God's intentions are clearly set forth in the commands and instructions that were given through Moses. There is no need for further discussion except in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus didn't set the teaching of Moses aside, but rather clarified some over emphases and lifted them into a higher realm, the realm of the intent of the heart. He taught that if the heart is pure, pure actions result. If the actions are impure, it indicates an impure heart. All sin issues from the heart.

David was a man after God's own heart, and though he himself sinned he was grieved by his sin as much as he was grieved by other men's sins. This is the true condition of a righteous man; he abhors evil wherever it is found. When it is found in his heart, he repents. Like David, the righteous seeks the deliverance of the Lord from all forms of evil. Righteous men always remember that the Lord's love is Unfailing Love. We go to him because we know he loves us, and his forgiveness is waiting our repentant request. Grace, grace, wonderful love expressed, paid for in full by the blood of Jesus and awaiting the cry for mercy from repentant sinners!

Chapter Eight

When Your Right but Can't Prove It

Psalm 7

A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.

O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, or they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me.

O LORD my God, if I have done this and there is guilt on my hands — if I have done evil to him who is at peace with me or without cause have robbed my foe — then let my enemy pursue and overtake me; let him trample my life to the ground and make me sleep in the dust. Selah

Arise, O LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice. Let the assembled peoples gather around you. Rule over them from on high; let the LORD judge the peoples. Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High. O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day. If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows.

He who is pregnant with evil and conceives trouble gives birth to disillusionment. He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

Have you ever been falsely accused? Singled out as a person who is to be avoided and not trusted? Have you ever been scrutinized and examined by someone who was determined to find a flaw in you? There is nothing more difficult to bear than the constant scrutiny of someone who demands perfection of you. Worse yet, is the pressure of evil people who are looking for an occasion to bring you down. David was a man who had a deep need to please the Lord, and apparently the people of Israel as well. Usually those who are most tender toward the Lord are also tender toward those around them. The desire to please is a good quality, but it can also be a burden to bear. Thus David cried out, “O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, or they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me.”

David was being pursued in some way by a man named Cush a Benjamite. What he was doing or how he was doing it is not revealed in the scriptures, but the distress it was causing David, and what he did in response is known. It seems that it involved a false accusation, causing David to go to the Lord expressing his innocence and pleading for help. He knew he was innocent of an act of aggression against this individual, but that doesn't always help.

I do prison ministry and on occasions someone will declare that they have been the victims of mistaken identity, unfortunate circumstances or overly ambitious prosecutors who have falsely accused them. There is a saying at prison that no one is guilty, and so it seems, but the truth is, some are guilty and some are not. Some are there because they were doing wrong and a crime was committed. They might not have done the exact crime, but if they had been living and doing right, they would not have been accused and convicted of the crime!

It is always more difficult when you are being accused of something you had absolutely nothing to do with and the accusation is from someone who knows you are innocent, and yet they

accuse you. David felt the pain of such deeds against him, and even though he was king, righteousness wouldn't permit him to take action. Those in authority must always be careful how they use the authority they have. Great men bear the weaknesses of the weak. Sometimes righteous acts look unrighteous to others of lesser understanding.

My wife received a call from a young woman who was in deep distress over a family situation. Unwittingly, she had found herself in a situation of having to choose between her husband's divorced parents, a very difficult place to be in. Her husband's mother was claiming that she shouldn't have anything to do with her father, because, he was guilty of sin that resulted in the breakup of the marriage. This person claimed that if she did associate with him, she would be guilty of the same sin.

I teach that sin goes both ways, that there is a sin of action and a sin of reaction. Many people sin action sins, but also repent, then sin again and again and each time repent. Why they sin has to do with many possible factors, but the important issue is their repentance. Those giving instruction should desire to help them live free of sin. If they are rebellious and unwilling to repent then appropriate actions must be taken.

What should leadership do in such a case? Cast out the weak individual, or pray, counsel and show love? The merciful will also receive mercy, and those who forgive will be forgiven.

The offending person, in this case, was likely the person doing the accusing rather than the accused. If the sin was so grievous that a marriage broke up over it, that is one thing, but to carry the bitterness of it into the future family relationships is quite another. What this young woman who called my wife was guilty of was not siding with sin, but rather trying to show love.

My wife's counsel was to cancel the plans that were being made that involved both parents and to plan an alternate event. This was received as the wisdom of the Lord. This way both parents were excluded without having to take sides.

It is a sad thing when individual's hearts are full of sin; and even worse when the sin is being justified. Only God can bring an answer in such situations. In the case cited, it may well be that both parents are right in their own eyes. Isn't this why grace is needed? Love covers a multitude of sin, and the grace of forgiveness allows the Holy Spirit opportunity to bring revelation to bear upon the heart seeking truth.

As pastor, when I see conflicts that solutions only bring more hurt, I do as David did; I take my case to the one who is able to exercise true justice in love. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance. Does this mean that all come to repentance? The evidence says no they do not. It is not for us to decide who should or should not be given grace. That decision belongs to God.

Those whose hearts are full of bitterness, judging harshly those who have offended them, stand in danger of being the one cast out. When Jesus was confronted with the woman taken in adultery, he didn't argue her innocence; he argued the condition of the hearts of her accusers.

Who among us is guiltless? Jesus told about two men who went to the temple one day to pray, one a sinner (a tax collector) and the other a Pharisee. The Pharisee knew all about the sins of the tax collector and told the Lord about them, giving thanks that he was not like him. The tax collector, on other hand, knew he was a sinner and pled for mercy. Jesus said the sinner left the place of prayer having been justified rather than the Pharisee. The Pharisee's heart was also full of sin but he didn't know it, while the tax collector knew he was a sinner and was repentant desiring the mercy of God. The Pharisee's goodness got in the way of repentance; he needed a condition of heart that acknowledges inherent wickedness whether expressed or not.

We all stand in the need of mercy because there's not one who is righteous, no not one. Adam's race stands condemned and every member is in need of the Savoir. When judgment is in order, God will judge. When we are confronted with difficult situations, we can take them to the Lord, knowing that he will vindicate the righteous and condemn the wicked.

Chapter Nine

What is Man After All?

Psalm 8

For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

O the love of God so rich and full of grace and mercy, and indeed, so free. David knew about God's unfailing love and it caused him to marvel! What really got to David was that God, who is creator of all and above all, would even care about us sinful humans. Why would one so powerful, so self-sufficient even want to associate with fallen humanity? This is what boggles the mind, not that he would judge sinners. Added to the wonder of it all is that he has a destiny in mind for the righteous that they, though created lower than heavenly beings, will be crowned with glory and honor!

How can this be? The plan is filled with wonder, yes; too wonderful to fully appreciate! God who created the heavens, the sun, moon and stars, loves us, though sinners, he cares for us. His love for us caused him to devise a plan that involves a substitutionary sacrifice; the sinner must associate himself with the death of the one who is being put to death in his stead and then associate himself with the resurrected state of the offerer. That is the miracle of salvation. Jesus died in our stead, and then was resurrected by God so that we might become partakers of his resurrected life. Having done this for us, we are now by faith a part of him, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (spiritually speaking). We have now become a part of his body the church, under whose feet everything has been placed. God placed Adam in the garden and gave him authority over all the created beings on this planet foreshadowing this state of authority. The process that makes this true is called metamorphosis (transformed, or transfigured). Though once a sinner, we are made righteous by the power of the one who is righteous, causing those who once loved evil to now love righteousness. Like maggots that once fed on corrupt flesh are changed into a flying insect, so man undergoes a metamorphosis of spirit making him morally and spiritually like God is. Paul prophetically declared, "the old is gone, the new has come." Prophetically, I say because, though we who are born again are not like we used to be, we are still not like we will be. Salvation, though complete, is still not fully completed in us, but we will be fully changed into the fullness of his stature and be transformed into his likeness when we see him.

"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalms 8:1) Some words are so wonderful that it seems we can't just say them; they must be said with the greatest sense of worship that can be mustered. When David put music to these Psalms he was adding a whole dimension to them that has been lost. Some have regained some of the original wonder by

putting them to music, but only God knows what the sound was like when David and his musicians played instruments while the people sang and danced. We have the words, and for now, we will glory in them and find comfort and instruction from them. David began the psalm with words of praise to God and ended it with praise to God, how appropriate. "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalms 8:9)

Chapter Ten

Justice is God's Glory

Psalm 9

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Death of the Son." A psalm of David.

I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you. For you have upheld my right and my cause; you have sat on your throne, judging righteously. You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever. Endless ruin has overtaken the enemy, you have uprooted their cities; even the memory of them has perished.

The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done. For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted. O LORD, see how my enemies persecute me!

Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death, that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation. The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden. The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. Higgsaion. Selah

The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God. But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish. Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, O LORD; let the nations know they are but men. Selah

King David trusted in the righteousness and justice of the Lord finding comfort in times of trouble. All around him were men of false motives cunningly waiting for the opportunity to express the evil of their hearts. David knew that as long as he lived righteously he could depend on the Lord to uphold him. The wicked would be dealt with by God, if not now, certainly in eternity.

We too, can take comfort in the knowledge of the justice of the Lord knowing that he will reward the righteous and judge the wicked. Those who walk in peace are those who know that life on earth is a temporary condition and that eternal life is where true justice is to be found.

What happens here is preparatory to eternity, and God the righteous judge sees all. Those who cling to the treasures of life will in the end lose those very things they love. Those who see the value of committing their lives to the Lord hold the affections of life loosely; ready to release whatever it is that is being contested. If wicked men seek to take from us what is rightfully ours, we have a right to make our appeal to human justice and also to the justice of God. If God sees fit to deal with the wicked in the immediate circumstance, we will see the salvation of the Lord and rejoice in his justice, if not, we will see the provisions of the Lord manifest in new and exciting ways. No matter what the outcome, we will still see justice in the end.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5:11-12)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:38-48)

Many have judged the words of Jesus as being wimpy and impractical, but are they? They are only so if your view of things is limited to the now. Children of the kingdom of God are those who are always looking beyond the parameters of this life. There is great peace in knowing that this life is not where “it’s at.” We who are children of eternity know that heaven awaits us and this gives us the ability to live a transcendent life on earth. Jesus said that those who listen and receive his words are those who build upon a solid rock that stands when the storms come against them. It takes real faith to live the life Jesus taught us to live. Faith is the connecting link between the seen and the unseen.

David spoke of the reign of God in the earth in the following words, “The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.” (Psalms 9:7-10)

The kingdom of God is an unseen kingdom that is available to the righteous by faith. God’s kingdom is all about us always, yet it remains unseen. We see the evidences of its existence when we act in faith and commit ourselves to his righteousness in the face of men who plot evil against us. It isn’t wimpy to trust God when the world says fight for your rights. Oh, they’re right, you know, unless of course, God really is with you. When you know that God is with you, you can appeal the cause of justice in a manner that pleases him. There is a time to negotiate, and there is a time to hold your peace. We are to bless and not to curse. Our actions should always have within them blessings for others. We are blessed most when our motive is to bless those around us.

Those who climb the ladder of success by walking on the backs of others will in the end loose; but those who consider the rights of others as more important than their own, win. We are called to be peacemakers, yet if we must fight our fight must have as its target, evil, not men. Sometimes evil cannot be dealt with without dealing with those who are its servants or advocates. There are times however, when men and evil become so synonymous that they must be dealt with. This is where law and law enforcement comes into play. Those in authority are there to be servants of the justice of God. If they fail in the task, God will judge them. In well-ordered societies, justice is committed to those in authority. Those who are governed must live within the laws of the land. It is only when laws are contrary to the divine laws that we are permitted to resist them. David found himself in such battles often, yet his appeal was to God.

Some people have struggled with the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 where he instructs us not to resist an evil person. Does this mean that if a man comes into your house and threatens to kill your family that you don’t take action against him? Of course not. There is a difference between dealing with an aggressor and dealing with a persecutor.

The key to understanding the words of Jesus is found in Matthew 5:10-11 “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are

you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.” When those around us are testing us because they know we are Christians, that is one thing, and when an aggressor comes to take advantage and exploit the innocent, that is quite a different matter. We are to defend those who are too weak to defend themselves. Defending the fatherless and the widow was always considered the righteous thing to do. Failure to do this brought judgment from God. In the end the wicked will have to face God, but the needy will receive their justice.

If you and your neighbor are disputing over what’s yours or his, take the path of peace. If this means releasing something you feel you are entitled to, God will look after your needs. Let it go because God is able to care for you. Sometimes the path of love and peace means giving in to others even when you know you are right. Being right is not always right! Peace is right and love wins in the end. If you cling to what you should release, what you cling to will become like a cursed thing!

The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God. But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish. Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, O LORD; let the nations know they are but men. Selah (Psalms 9:17-20)

Chapter Eleven

Who is in Authority, Man or God?

Psalm 10

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, “Nothing will shake me; I’ll always be happy and never have trouble.” His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength. He says to himself, “God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees.”

Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, “He won’t call me to account”? But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out.

The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

Wicked men commit their sinful deeds flagrantly in the face of God and man, and does God care? Many have called God into account questioning his integrity because wicked men seem to go unpunished while the innocent suffers. Is that really the case however? Do wicked men really get away with wickedness? This Psalm is an appeal to God to remember and take action.

What seems difficult to understand is that God has set this world into its orbit with systems of life and death and boundaries in which they are allowed to function without interference. Man

has been placed on earth to oversee everything that happens on earth. It isn't that God has taken his hand off the planet, but he allows man to function and express what is in his heart until it gets to a level that things could spin out of control, then he steps in. God has retained the power of life and death, but it too, is left to function according to predetermined laws of cause and effect.

God is the creator of life, but creatures interacting in a sexual way are the cause of the beginning of new life forms. God doesn't interfere in this process but where man is concerned; he has given us guidelines and intelligence to be used in controlling the process. Whereas we have been given the power to cause life to begin, we also have the power to cause it to come to an end. Despite the fact that man can determine these things, God still calls all actions into account.

Most people are unaware of the power they possess as a human being on planet earth. God gave Adam dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and everything that moves upon the surface of the earth. As a result of the fall of man into disobedience (sin), the earth was cursed, and therefore, all the endeavors of mankind have been made difficult. There is a constant struggle against diseases, natural disasters and predators. One life form feeds on other life forms, and disasters, such as floods, famines, earthquakes, storms and such like, are constant threats. For the most part, these are all controlled by what we call natural laws. God established these laws and allows them to go unrestrained until either he must intervene for reasons that pertain to the performance of his overriding will, or man makes an appeal to him to do so. Even evil men are allowed to go unrestrained unless righteous men rise up to control the situation through laws or the enforcement of laws. God also responds to the situation when those who are affected by the evil make an appeal.

God is the ultimate judge of the inhabitants of the earth. He is the accountant, and man will have to face him and give an account. No one will escape that appointment. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27 KJV) Every word and every deed will be called into account.

When we speak, our words have the power to affect those around us, for example, if a parent speaks words of counsel and encouragement to their children, they will grow up reflecting those words in the life they live. If they demean them and discourage them they make life very difficult for their children.

When we speak of the power of the tongue, we must not become superstitious assigning powers not intended. Some have crossed over into the realm of the occult assigning some sort of spiritual energy to their words that allows for demonic activity. The realm of man's authority and activity is to be in the natural realm. The only exception to this principle is when God imparts the gifts of the Holy Spirit to individuals for the purpose of spreading the gospel message and the healing of the people of God. In the Mosaic Law, God forbid activities that enabled people to act in the supernatural realms because doing so was involving Satan, the prince of the power of the air, and demonic beings who help him.

Many people go around thinking that God is controlling every detail that happens on earth. He does, but mostly through natural laws. Those who think God is causing everything to be as it is, blame God when things go bad. If they go down the road and their automobile goes out of control they blame God, never mind they may have neglected to maintain their vehicle properly, or were driving too fast or encountered another vehicle that was out of control. If someone is killed in this manner, they blame God.

Christians have a great advantage in the course of life. We have a relationship with God who loves us, cares for us, and will often protect us from what would otherwise happen to us. Trying to live life without a relationship with God is pure folly. God listens to the appeals of men he deems righteous because of their faith in the blood of Jesus, but he also listens to sinners who are being called out of sin, but haven't yet come to the knowledge of Christ.

When we need supernatural intervention, the proper method is to make an appeal to God in prayer, and thus, giving the prerogative to God, we leave the outcome to his discretion. God is a jealous God, and does not want man wittingly or unwittingly involving other spiritual beings.

Man is not a supernatural being, therefore, any activity that involves the supernatural is either going to be the Lord God or a demonic spirit. We are free to operate up to the point where the supernatural comes into play, and we are permitted to do what we know to do in the natural realm. In matters of health, for example, we should use proper diet, known medical methods of intervention, hygiene, and all such methods of controlling what can be controlled. When these methods fail, and even before, we are encouraged to seek healing from the Lord God. I say the Lord God, to distinguish between the false religious concepts of a god, or any god.

There is one Lord God, and when we come to him, we come in the name of Jesus or if you're Greek, Lesous (ee-ay-sooce'). (See Strong's Concordance) or if your Hebrew, Yahowshuwa` (yeh-ho-shoo'-ah) or Yahowshu`a (yeh-ho-shoo'-ah) the translated name is Joshua in the Old Testament.

When names are used it's a good idea to distinguish who it is you are speaking of or to. The purpose of a name is to identify precisely who we are speaking of but sometimes a name is not enough. Generally when we say God or Jesus, the person to whom we are speaking knows precisely who we are referring to, but in some circles today the lines are becoming blurred. If we sense that there is confusion in this matter, we should use descriptive language to clarify just who it is we are speaking of.

Psalm Ten is a Psalm of appeal to God for intervention when evil is going unrestrained or can't be restrained by available methods. In this Psalm, David is reminding God of what evil men are doing, then appeals to God to defend the weak, after which, he expresses confidence in God that he will act justly, because, he is the eternal King. Intervention is not an automatic occurrence, but rather results when people appeal to him. As King, David is asking God to enter the realm of his authority and to act freely against evil men.

Can we say that God honors human authority? Evidently he does. This is why it is so important for those in positions of authority to ask God for his intervention. Heads of households, cities, states and nations, all need to acknowledge God and ask for his intervention. This doesn't mean that God is forbidden to work within the realms of human authority, but it is an advantage when those in authority are in accord. God is King of all the Earth and has ultimate authority over everything; nevertheless, he still respects human rights of self-determination. He wants us to call upon him, seek him, and give ourselves to him in worshipful service.

Chapter Twelve

Keep the Foundation Secure

Psalm 11

For the director of music. Of David.

In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.

For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.

“When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” How distressing it is to the righteous when they witness the erosion of the foundations upon which a nation or culture has become strong. Such is the case in America. We have been blessed above all nations upon the earth. Never has a nation had so much prosperity in the material world.

The nations of the earth have institutions of learning, and many of them see the young people that they have trained leave their homelands to move to America where prosperity is on every hand. This has resulted in an unprecedented accumulation of intellectual power within the nation. Not only do we have the best and the brightest natural born talent, but now talent from all over the world.

Those businesses that depend upon the results that increase of knowledge brings, view this accumulation of talent as a good thing. Whereas it is a good thing when viewed from a materialistic point of view, it also has dangers involved with it. When people of a foreign culture saturate a population, they bring their former culture with them. Gaining strength from one another, they tend to remain as they were culturally. This has an effect upon the nation as a whole, because, it also involves religions. Lifestyles and religions go hand in hand, and when the religious foundation of a nation loses its identity, it also loses its way. Religions give stability to nations, but religious confusion causes erosion especially in moral definition. As people lose their religious identity, they also lose their moral stability.

What we have been seeing in the life of this nation has been shifts from a pro-Christian belief base to intellectual skepticism resulting in a cultural loss of religious morality. Those who consider themselves non-religious, have increased in numbers. The recent shift to a more spiritual attitude is viewed by many as progress; but to the alarm of those who understand that religion must be founded upon a correct understanding of God, and what he expects of us, is viewed with alarm seeing confusion in this new trend. What seems to be happening is the tolerance that led to skepticism is also leading us to tear down the old foundations of spiritual understanding. The old, they say, is too narrow, too biased, not allowing for the religions of other nations to feel comfortable in our midst. The result is a pressure to modify our beliefs to accommodate others, and thus, instead of non-Christians changing and coming to the understanding of the truth about God, many are departing from the foundational teachings about Christ to a more open theological position. Trends of this sort always result in a deterioration of pure spiritual understanding and lead to an alloy like result.

I heard it expressed that when you become broadminded you are in danger of becoming flat. That, however, is the least concern. The purpose of Christianity is not to be a cultural influence to guide a nation, but rather a proclamation of what it takes to make preparations to meet God. Our commission is to tell the world the good news about salvation and to teach them about Jesus. The new spirituality of our day has little or nothing to do with Jesus. Jesus is the problem that prevents the formation of a generic religion that seems desirable to an open society. Our society wants to be able to say, “your okay, and I’m okay,” but Jesus says “no, your not okay,” you need a Savior and I am the one and only Savior. This excludes all other concepts about what leads to eternal life and peace with God.

To believe in Jesus is to believe in the revelation of the Bible that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners. Religion is not a multiple choice; it is a fixed point of reference and any effort to make it more palatable results in the loss of its mission. Christianity is supposed to get in the face of all concepts about God that are not pure and testify against their errors. True advocates of salvation by faith are confrontational. Those who are looking for a “one size fits all” religion must not find it in Christianity. If the label says Christian, and the message is generic, it is a cult. Christianity does not embrace non-Christian religions to treat them as equals.

If this is offensive, then we must be offensive. True Christians are offensive to those who want everyone to be accepted as equals, but our offensiveness is not with pride, but rather with sadness. It is based on our concept of the need for men everywhere to repent. We don't want a person to remain in the deception and ignorance that leads to eternal separation from God.

It is distressing to see the foundational stones of truth about Jesus being attack on every hand. Truly wicked men are shooting their arrows of accusation, seeking to destroy the credibility of the righteous, and thus, intimidate them and cause them to become silent. But God is in his heavenly temple looking at the affairs of men, weighing their deeds, and analyzing their hearts.

God will reward the righteous and judge the wicked. Tragically, many who think themselves righteous are not. True Righteousness is a gift of God that results from faith in Jesus Christ alone. God loves those who seek his face.

Chapter Thirteen

Burn Cleansing Furnace, Burn!

Psalm 12

For the director of music. According to sheminith. A psalm of David.

Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception. May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, "We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips — who is our master?"

"Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the LORD. "I will protect them from those who malign them."

And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever. The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.

The picture of godlessness portrayed in this Psalm is one we have all seen in our day as well. Wicked men strutting about because what is vile is honored among men, the sort that is described in this Psalm is all too familiar. The farther a person or society gets from God, the more arrogant and evil they become. It's easy to look at those around us and conclude that all men are liars and that no one is faithful to true values anymore. This is especially true if you are in a group of self-seeking individuals who are living for their own pleasures.

The expression used, "it's my body, I will do with it as I please" is an attitude prevalent in the world regarding one's own body. It is the underlying attitude that is the cause of the millions of babies that have been aborted. The notion that a woman has a right to either give birth to a baby or not as a matter of an "after-the-fact" decision is based on this concept. The Psalmist referred to this in reference to the idea that a person can lie if they want to because their tongue is their property. "No one can tell me what I can and cannot do with my body," is the phrase often used by those in rebellion to teachings about moral responsibility. It seems that little has changed since David wrote this Psalm.

The divine response is that the Lord will now arise and come to the defense of those who are too weak to defend themselves. How, and why? Because the word of the Lord is flawless and

when applied to the human condition, will refine the silver of our natures, that is, the ability to love and please the Lord, as was our original state before sin came in and perverted it.

The expression “like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times,” brings me to thinking about a booklet I wrote called Seven Healing Streams. It is taken from Isaiah chapter eleven and ending in chapter twelve. First of all the statement “refined in a furnace of clay,” is a strange statement because normally it is clay that is refined in a furnace. However, our outer man is referred to as being clay, and our inner man is what needs to be refined.

Without reproducing what was written in the title mentioned, briefly, a condition is described of violence and how it will be dealt with. The Spirit of the Lord is the means by which healing and restoration comes to man, and thus seven categories of the Spirit of the Lord are given: 1. “The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding. 2. The Spirit of counsel and of power. 3. The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD — and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. 4. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. 5. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 6. Righteousness will be his belt. 7. Faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Each of these categories is demonstrated to be a healing stream as we apply them experientially to our lives. The result is that the natural enemies described in this passage that represent the internal conflict between the new spiritual man and the old mind and heart of the flesh is subdued. When peace is ministered into our spirit through the refining process, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth (this physical body we live in) will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

In this we see that the spirit of war has been dealt with to the extent that these natural enemies that resulted from the curse upon the earth, are now at peace because, the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea, just as peace is now reigning in our hearts.

In the Psalm before us, we have the reference to the cleansing work as being a furnace cleansing work. “Furnace of clay” can easily be understood to be, hot trials experienced in the daily life of an individual with the outcome of cleansing the inner silver of the implanted Word of God finding expression through our new birth natures. It is the dross of our fallen natures that is the enemy of God. The reference to seven times connects to the idea that it is identification with the nature of God that is the means of purification. We see a similar reference in the Book of Revelations, where the picture is of the Seven Spirits of God. Because there is only one Spirit of God, this must refer to the various expressions of his character that are described for us in Isaiah chapter eleven. Thus, just as these are seen as healing streams in Isaiah, they are described as hot trials against what is opposed to righteousness in Psalms 12.

Since the Bible is a divinely inspired book, continuity of thought is found throughout. The word pictures change, but the teachings remain constant. God wants man to come to him so that he can impart to him the understanding that it is love, not war, peace, not conflict, joy, not pleasures, and righteousness, not sin that satisfies the longing of the spirit of man. After we have come to the end of sinning, and returned to the Lord and allowed him to bathe us in his healing Spirit, washing the ashes of the burned up sinfulness of our fallen natures away; we then worship him in purity of heart and soul!

In the scriptures we have several veins of thought. First, that man was created perfect and his purpose was to fellowship with God. Second, that man fell into sin, thus breaking fellowship with God. Third, that man cannot return to God without justice being satisfied. Fourth, that Man cannot satisfy God's righteous demands; therefore, a substitute sacrifice must be given. Fifth, that Jesus is that sacrifice, being God incarnate, to pay the penalty of our sins. Sixth, that the way

was thus made at the cross, where Jesus died, for the work of the Holy Spirit to begin, the work of restoration and cleansing. And then, seventhly, that having been restored, man can now truly worship in Spirit and in Truth.

The story is told in many ways, in types and shadows, in Psalms and prophecies, in inspired statements, here a little, there a little it is expounded and amplified. It is taught in the New Testament with promises of total fulfillment of everything in the heart of God in the heavenly kingdom to come. So don't worry, he will keep us safe, even when wicked men strut about and hurl insults at us; we have a destiny they don't share.

Chapter Fourteen

God is Longsuffering to the Extreme!

Psalm 13

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

I have a friend in prison that committed a heinous crime many years ago. Since then he has sought and received the forgiveness of the Lord, and has sought the forgiveness of the survivors of the victims of the crime. At least one of the individuals who is a close relative of a victim came to him and forgave him, but another has taken it upon himself to make life as much of a hell as possible. As I read this Psalm I think of him because his enemy has all too often triumphed over him. If his actions had been done justly, that would be one thing, but that has not been the case. His enemy has had to resort to lies to accomplish his purposes against him.

The end of the story has not been written yet, in the end he will triumph over his enemy! I know this because, he is a brother in the Lord who trusts in the unfailing love of God, and rejoices in his salvation. He also sings to the Lord, for he has been good to him.

Do you have an enemy that will not go away? Is he/she always there, making life miserable for you? Perhaps it is because you either committed a crime or sin against them, or they thought you did, but that's history now, you've changed, but they haven't. We can't undo history, what was done bears its consequences. We can however, seek to bring peace to a bad situation. When our efforts have failed, God's unfailing love is always there for us. If justice is needed against the person that has become our enemy, he will do what needs to be done, only in his good time. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance, therefore; it is God's will to first offer forgiveness and cleansing to the person who is acting against us.

If we fail to pray for them, we are guilty of seeking vengeance, but where is love in that? Desires for vengeance beget, desires for vengeance, but forgiveness heals many wounds.

There are some enemies that are enemies because, they have chosen to be enemies; good reasons aren't always the reason. These individuals cause us to wrestle with our thoughts, "why are they doing this to us?" "What have we done?" "How dare they!" "Well, if that's the way they want to be, I'll show them!" "Two can play that game you know"—and so go our thoughts. But, where is love in that? Therefore, we struggle to avoid being bitter, to forgive, to ignore, to do the right thing in spite of the outcome. It's not easy to go against every fleshly instinct to get even, but vengeance belongs to the Lord, he will repay! But how will he repay? Will God shower them with love and grace, and extend mercy instead of the mean spirited vengeance we think they deserve? If so, how will we feel about that?

When David spoke of the wrestling of his mind and the sorrow of his heart, was it because he was being torn with these two opposing thoughts, vengeance and mercy? In the end he abandons his agony and turns to the Lord comforting himself with the knowledge of God's unfailing love. There is a place of refuge from the stormy blast of life; it is in the knowledge of the unfailing love of God! We rejoice in his love, and know that he is a God we can trust to deal with all conflicts righteously.

Every Christian must come to the realization that God doesn't find any pleasure in punishment. God is long suffering to the extreme, hoping and working toward the salvation of every person. God would much rather bring a person to repentance, and thus, to forgiveness, than to judgment. This is why it is so important for those who have received grace to extend grace. God is merciful to the merciful, and shows love to those who love. The fallen nature of man is not that way, however. It takes an act of violence against our sin nature to say no to our flesh. Death to the evil instincts that came into us due to the fall can be painful, but in the end, there is great joy.

Sometimes it's good to reflect on the forgiveness that God has given us; this helps us deal with our own need to forgive. The Psalm ends with a statement, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me." Never mind what others are doing, when our heart is in worship, there is no room for concerns over such pettiness. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.

Chapter Fifteen

A Lament Over the Lost

Psalms Fourteen

For the director of music. Of David.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.

The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Will evildoers never learn — those who devour my people, as men eat bread, and who do not call on the LORD? There they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous. You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.

Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

“The way of the unfaithful (transgressor KJV) is hard.” (Proverbs 13:15) God looks upon man and sees a condition of hopeless abandon to evil. You might think, “If it’s really that bad, why doesn’t God just wipe out humanity and start over? He could, you know, but he can’t! His love doesn’t permit it! God calls to men everywhere to repent. He calls, but few answer, why? Because they are looking in all the wrong places! They have yearnings that are present life related. They search for answers to the riddle of life, but come up empty.

Romans 3:10-18

“There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.”
“Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.”
“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”
“Their mouths are full of cursing and
bitterness.”
“Their feet are swift to shed blood;
ruin and misery mark their ways,
and the way of peace they do not know.”
“There is no fear of God before their
eyes.”

The Psalmist cried out, **“Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!”** **The definition of Zion is barrenness!** Do Christians understand that what God offers is not the well-watered plain of the Jordan River? Christians sometimes stand with an Abraham and like Lot of old, respond to the challenge to choose where they wish to go. (See Genesis 13) Then their heart’s desire causes them to look at the plains of Jordan (the prosperity of the world). Standing beside these Lots is Abraham that we are told looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. Lot looked down in the direction of the gravitational pull of his flesh nature and saw what he longed for; Abraham looked up in the direction of the gravitational pull upon his spirit and saw a heavenly city, (Hebrews 11:10) and reached for it. Abraham settled for the barren heights of the hill country, but found the favor of God. Lot settled in the lowlands toward Sodom, and soon became an inhabitant of the city. That’s what happens when you pitch your tent close to the world. You soon take up residence in it.

Those who thirst for God will look for him. If you’re thirsty, the logical thing to do is look for water. You don’t search for water in a dry place. You don’t go to the desert to find refreshing streams of water, that wouldn’t make sense, but that is where the water of salvation is found! The water of life comes from the rock that Israel found in the desert! That rock is Christ! This is where the Spirit leads those who thirst for God, to the rock of our salvation. Isaiah said that he is a root out of dry ground! What contradictions of thought, unless of course, your heart seeks a heavenly vision — a heavenly city and a Savior who is Christ the Lord! We don’t find him in the spirit of the world, nor do we find him in the message of “please me please” — the message of selfish pursuits and selfism. He is found where the message of the cross is taught — the message

of putting the will and purposes of God first. When we embrace the concept of dying, we discover life.

While looking to the future coming of Christ, Isaiah said,

Isaiah 52:7-15

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the LORD. But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard. See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him — his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness — so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Isaiah 53:1-7

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

This passage in Isaiah is addressed to Zion, those who have chosen barrenness in the world rather than to compromise. They are exhorted, "Your God reigns!" This is the message of salvation to them; this is the hope of Jerusalem! They are instructed by their watchmen to shout for joy, because God is returning to Zion! He comes in a manner that is appalling to fallen man; he comes telling his people to get out of the former city of their dwelling.

Jerusalem had become polluted with idolatry, and therefore, would soon be judged. Those who handled the holy things of God were instructed not to even touch what had become unclean. Those who are obedient to the counsel of the Lord flee from what is unclean; however, not recklessly hastening in fear, for God is with them.

The designated servant of the Lord was coming and he would act wisely. He would be lifted up and highly exalted, but not as the world expected. His lifting up would be in his sacrificial life and death. He would be a witness to the world.

The arm of the Lord was about to be revealed, but not in the way of the world. For out of barrenness would spring life! At first only a root, a solitary life, but what is a root doing in dry ground? Why would the prophet speak of this one coming as being the one from whom we would turn our faces? If he is the answer to what man needs, why didn't he associate with the wealth of the world? Why didn't he go to the power brokers of his time? Why didn't he convince the religious leaders of his mission and secure their support?

Jesus didn't come to fix this fallen world, nor did he come to satisfy the cravings of our fallen natures. He came to rescue us out of the world by paying the penalty of our sins. The old Jerusalem had become polluted by the fallen natures of the inhabitants; therefore, those who were not of the world were called out of her. God has a New Jerusalem awaiting those who will turn from the pollution of the world. All he asks of them is to repent and believe in him, and receive

the gift of eternal life. He calls to us to leave the old life of sin and selfishness, and to embrace the new life that has been given to us by Jesus! His life leads us to a New Jerusalem where those who are righteous and love one another, dwell.

Some men foolishly try to deny God. Scientists are having a difficult time trying to deny the existence of God as creator. They come up with their theories of how all that they see has come to be, but always they have to assume that there was something already in existence. Even the now famous “big bang” theory assumes that something existed that banged! If it was an explosion of some kind, what exploded?

Creation is no mystery really, except that all the details about the methods and mechanics of how it was done are not revealed. God has clearly told us in the first verses of the Bible all we really need to know. He spoke, and the Spirit hovered creating what was spoken! What was spoken was the will and heart of God, and the Spirit made it tangible, as we know it. The work was finished in six days. There is an argument about how long the days of Genesis 1 were? Was it twenty-four hours, a stumbling block in the minds of some scientists, a thousand years (Answering to the scripture that says that a thousand years is as a day with the Lord.), or an undisclosed period of time, such as an age? If it were twenty-four hours, then it would relate to revolutions of the earth. Then evening and morning would be a defining statement. If it were an age then evening and morning would take on a poetic meaning which when expressed would be an age beginning in the fading light of the previous age and lasting until its fading light gives way to the beginning of a new age. The Jewish day started at sun down of the previous day.

The reason that science is so intent on denying the Biblical account is that if it accepts the Bible as God’s revealed word to man, then the teachings of the Bible must also be accepted. The existence of conflicting religious views seems to be a good reason to shy away from any Biblical interpretation. In the present political climate, acceptance of the creation story as a fact upon which to base all future exploration would seem to be choosing one religion above another. To some this may seem out of bounds for a government, but the truth is, it is not. It is foolhardy to say that pursuing truth, and validating what is truth is wrong. Since the Bible really is God’s inspired revelation to man, all governments will have to give an account for what they did with reference to it. Ignorance of truth is no excuse especially when knowledge is available. Those who are a part of the governments of the world will have to face God and give an account of their actions to God. If they have been noble and acted righteously seeking to influence their government in a righteous direction, they will be rewarded.

The fact that our government is forbidden to choose one religion, or denomination, over another doesn’t mean that it is forbidden from choosing the Bible as God’s inspired word. The government is to simply leave interpretations to the churches and allow them the freedom of functioning without governmental interference.

Those governments or people, who plot against the poor to exploit them, will one-day stand overwhelmed with dread as God Almighty judges evildoers. God is always on the side of the righteous no matter whether they are affluent or poor, (righteousness is the expression of the heart of God.) David prophesied that a day of restoration was coming and the fortunes (real values) of the people of God would be restored, that salvation would come out of Zion (barrenness).

Chapter Sixteen

God’s Holy Hill

Psalm 15

A psalm of David.

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?
He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things will never be shaken.

We learned from Psalms 14:3 that no one is righteous, “there is no one who does good, not even one.” Now in Psalms 15 we learn what it takes to dwell in the sanctuary of the Lord, to live on his holy hill.

Man can never hope to please the Lord without a radical change of heart! Who among us can walk blamelessly, always speaking the truth from his heart? Have you ever found yourself in a situation where the truth may not be the best thing to speak, or perhaps even forbidden? Some are experts in avoiding having to speak deceitfully, but at times everyone finds themselves in awkward situations where the blunt truth would be too painful, therefore, shading it is mercy. Have you ever applauded a poor performance because you didn't want to hurt the performer? We don't call it deceitfulness; we call it being gracious. I don't say this to condemn the innocent, but rather to call attention to how conflicting moralities can come into play in situations, and what we do must be from a pure heart. Unfortunately, unless we have experienced a change of heart and spirit, what will come from us won't always be very pure.

Assuming we have been born again and therefore possess the Spirit of life, the enabling Holy Spirit, and yet must make choices with reference to applications in our daily lives, the instructions of this Psalm become instructive to us. However, no matter how well intentioned we are, and how close we walk with the Lord, due to lack of knowledge or wisdom, we will offend. How then can we dwell on his holy hill?

This is the good news of the gospel; Jesus came to save sinners! We all stand under the indictment of sin. We fail to live up to the command to be perfect, even though we want to. Our failure is not always rebellion against the Lord. There are times when, try as we will, we fall short. The reason is because we are not perfect in knowledge. This is why we never cease to need saving grace while in this world. This understanding of our continual need is not a cover or excuse for unrighteous behavior, merely, recognition that no matter what degree of spiritual growth we achieve, still in ourselves we can never fully measure up to the perfection of God. Righteousness, therefore, is a grant based on the substitutionary life and death of Jesus Christ. When the scripture says, “be perfect as he is perfect,” I stand condemned because, how can I be perfect when I don't know what perfection really is? True, pure, unadulterated perfection is beyond me; nevertheless, I strive to be perfect according to the knowledge I have.

When I read the requirements of holiness, I call upon the resource of his power, and trust in his grace while I strive to do what is required of me. Because of Calvary, passages such as this are not taken as indictments against me, but rather instruction on how I can be more acceptable in my behavior while still not trusting in my own righteous conduct. Jesus Christ came and paid the full penalty for the sins of all mankind, and therefore, we who believe in him have eternal life based on his life, not ours. This doesn't mean that we are not to be holy; it means that now we can be holy, because, he deals a deathblow to the sin nature as we appropriate his life giving power.

The principle of fellowship is based upon two individuals who are in agreement in thought and actions—the greater the level of agreement, the greater the fellowship. When two individuals clash over an action or thought, fellowship is marred if not broken. This is the underlying cause of many marital disruptions. Sometimes the issue is something of major consequence, and at other times it is rather minor, but irritating. Small irritations may not at once cause major breaks in fellowship, but if allowed to go unresolved will undermine the depth of feelings for one another. In the Songs of Solomon we are told that it is the little foxes (little sins or disagreements) that spoil the vineyard (2:15), and so it is in relationships. In our relationship with God, we should never assume that he would understand. Some have sought to justify themselves by saying, “He knows my heart,” or, “I’m just human,” but does that mean that he must overlook our misdeeds? I am grateful that God is gracious and kind, and that when I fail in some matter, he forgives and comforts me, but this never means that he approves of bad conduct, or that he will not chastise if chastisement is appropriate. God works with us to bring us into greater and greater fellowship with himself.

The Psalmist asked the question, who can dwell on his holy hill, to which he replied, 1. He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous. 2. Who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue. 3. Who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman. 4. Who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD. 5. Who keeps his oath even when it hurts. 6. Who lends his money without usury. 7. And does not accept a bribe against the innocent. (Ps. 15:2-5) These are the ones; therefore, it should not be taken lightly.

Each of these issues needs to be studied and applied in our lives. Notice that there are seven issues listed here. These seven issues relate to the fulfillment of the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. We can’t deal deceitfully with one another and have fellowship with God! There are always two parts to our relationship with God, the vertical dimension, and the horizontal dimension. This I call the “Spirit of the Cross.” The vertical dimension of the cross was expressed by Jesus when he said, “Not my will but your will be done.” And the Horizontal dimension was expressed when he said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” These two attitudes of heart were constant in the Lord Jesus. They were what drove him to the cross.

We can only be complete in him when we are in right relationship with him and his body the Church. A breach of fellowship with a member of his body is equal to a breach of fellowship with the Lord Jesus! This is why it is so vital to discern the body of the Lord Jesus when receiving communion. There are some churches that practice closed communion, meaning that unless you are a part of them you are excluded from receiving the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus. It is my belief that unless we love the entire body of Christ willingly practicing fellowship on whatever level we are able, that we are guilty before the Lord Jesus of unrighteous breaches of fellowship; however, it is not for me to decide the policies of any church other than my own. We should, in my opinion, be able to fellowship with one another despite our differences of opinions about doctrine. Whether a church will allow me to have communion with them, or not, is not a matter for me to decide, only that I will fellowship with all members of the body of Christ to the best my ability.

There is one vital doctrine that determines our fellowship; it is the doctrine of salvation by faith in the shed blood of Jesus for the remission of our sins. This is what brings a person into fellowship with Jesus and begins our fellowship with his body the Church. Doctrinal agreement comes later, and we will never all agree on all of them. Agreement within a given body of believers is desirable, if not necessary, but love must never be based upon agreement. We can fellowship even if we disagree; however, our fellowship is based upon what we agree upon. The apostle John said, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” In other words, if we will look after the fellowship, the Lord will take care of the offenses. In practice, even doctrinal differences either are corrected by the ministry of the Spirit, or are made non-important. Our

unity should always be based on the work of Jesus and not upon our interpretations or individual ideas.

Fellowship with God is in a sense, fellowship with one another. How many times has it been true that those who fall out of fellowship with the church also fall out of fellowship with the Lord? This becomes evident in how they live their lives, the sort of entertainment they seek out, the way they treat one another and moral issues that begin to go outside the Biblical boundaries of proper Christian conduct.

In short, we must never neglect our relationships with one another if we wish to remain in proper relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Chapter Seventeen

A Prayer for Safety

Psalms Sixteen

A miktam of David.

Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips.

LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

How great is the Lord God Almighty! He is the one in whom our soul trusts. The knowledge of the exclusive goodness of God had been revealed to David, and his heart rejoiced in those who worship the Lord. They are the beautiful people of the earth, the real beautiful people. They don't need a press agent to speak well of them, or a bag of cosmetics to cover their blemishes because; their beauty is a beauty of the spirit. Jesus likened them to the lilies of the field that are more glorious than Solomon with all his wealth.

The glory of the lily is that it is totally unpretentious. It gives forth its beauty and fragrance no matter where it is planted. All it requires is the nutrients of life, and please don't harm it, but even if you do, it will still do its best to give the world beauty. The lily doesn't notice if a crowd is watching, or if it is in a solitary place. It doesn't care who is looking, whether scoundrel or king. It doesn't smile for a camera, then curse at those near by; it is totally unaffected by what affects mankind. It needs no applause, only sunlight, rain and space. It gives its glory to God, but if people see it and are blessed, that's okay. This glory did not belong to Solomon, but rather to the one that was greater than Solomon, Jesus, and yes, to those in whose hearts he dwells.

How sad is the plight of those who trust in other than the Lord. Their lives are being wasted and their end is destruction. No matter what they do to try to redeem themselves, it is to no avail.

There is only one remedy for wickedness, and those who seek other gods will never find it. Satan is very clever in his deceptions always disguising his intentions with some temporal feeling or blessing. He puts his carrot on a stick and dangles it before those who seek after him, leading them to eternal damnation. He is careful not to show his true nature until it is too late. In the end he mocks those who are deceived by him. It is his greatest joy to deceive a lost soul and keep him from salvation, because, by doing so, he hurts God. God is the object of the hate of Satan and those who follow him.

Satan is clever about how he puts his false gods up before people deceiving them into believing that they are worshipping the one true God. We are told that names don't matter, call God whatever you think is right; it doesn't matter. All spiritual roads lead to heaven, they say, but do they?

It is our concept of God that determines who it is that we are speaking of. If we are deceived into thinking that God is the Great Spirit, or that he is "Mother Nature", or that he is a Hindu god, or an Islamic god, our concept of him has become perverse, and therefore, we are deceived. There are many false concepts of God in the world today, and Satan is inventing new ones all the time it seems. Some of these false God concepts are under the Christian label and even under the name of Jesus. If the Jesus we seek is not the true one who came to save us, then the concoction of ideas and imaginations about what he is like are coming from the wrong source. There are those who deny that one must believe in Jesus and his work of salvation upon the cross to be saved. They see Jesus as a way, not the Way, a truth, not the Truth, a savior, not the only Savior, and therefore miss the mark.

One day the mask of Satan will be stripped from his face and the entire world will see how weak and insignificant this being really is. I was in a home, one day, of some people who were formerly Catholic people who had come to see that some of the Catholic teachings were not correct. One of these teachings has to do with the worship of Mary as the Mother of God. They had come to understand that Mary is indeed blessed among women and to be greatly honored, but that she is not the Mother of God. She was the handmaid of the Lord allowed to become the vessel in which the Lord God Almighty prepared the body of the Lord Jesus. They saw that the idea that she should be represented by an image was wrong and that she should not be either worshipped or prayed to.

A problem had arisen in their home that suggested a problem in the spiritual realm. I questioned them about whether they had any items in their home that might not be appropriate. They responded that they had removed everything that was suggestive of spiritual mysticism. Then as an after-thought, the wife of the man whose house we were in said that she had an image of Mary, that she had put it in a box and that she was trying to think of an appropriate way of disposing of it. At this point I wish to make it clear that I had never told them anything about this whole subject. They came to this understanding completely on their own. When she mentioned this, I immediately recognized that she was superstitious about this. I then confronted her with her superstition and she acknowledged that it was true. She then went and got it and took it out to the garbage collection cart and broke it. The interesting thing about this was that at that very moment when she was confronting her superstition, a woman in another part of the house saw a vision of a huge demon spirit. She saw the Lord in the vision go to it and touch it with his finger and when he did it broke into pieces; it was merely pottery! When she came in and related the experience, we could immediately see the connection between what the woman saw in vision and what we had experienced in the back area of the home. The problem they were having in the home was also cured at that time.

Many people are held captive to some religious superstition that manifests itself in many ways. First, I am not trying to trash the Catholic Church, nor would I want to. Religious superstition is to be found in many churches, not just Catholic Churches. We who are Christians aren't called to be superstitious; we have been called to a relationship with Jesus. For example people sometimes wear crosses in a superstitious manner thinking it will protect them from evil.

Now, I don't think there is anything wrong with wearing a cross as identification, but wearing it as a protection is silly. Symbols don't save us; Jesus is the Savior. Pieces of cloth, pottery, metal, wood or any such like are powerless to protect us, help us or save us; it takes the power of Jesus and what he did for us.

It's easy to fall into a superstitious mode in the practice of our faith. Religious articles are a part of every religious practice, and while assigning a sense of reverence to those things used in the expression of our faith is appropriate, becoming superstitious about them is not. In the tradition I am from we partake of communion as a part of our expression of faith. We use trays with little glasses that are filled with grape juice and a dish that broken pieces of cracker are placed on. These emblems represent the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, and when received reverently provide an opportunity to receive the saving and healing power of Jesus by faith in him. The emblems themselves are nothing more than juice and crackers, but it is what is in the heart of the worshipper that is important. I suppose this is true of many articles we use in the course of our religious lives. Symbols, furniture, literature, religious formats, prayers and all such like are either a valid part of our faith or idolatry, depending upon what is happening within the individual. It's Satan's purpose to distract us from a true relationship with Jesus by providing substitutes as focal points of our faith.

Some people get very worked up about many things—words, doctrines, methods, creeds, translations, denominations and such like. Which ones are the right ones? Some people believe that churches and denominations are wrong, and therefore, don't worship with anyone. I am convinced that it is Satan's purpose to divide Christians into as many little camps as possible and to thus weaken our influence in the world.

I advocate a sense of unity based on common faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. He is our common ground and all doctrinal issues should be treated in a manner that does not exclude any person that is a part of him from our love and unity. Doctrines, systems of doctrine, creeds, worship styles, and all such like are only useful when they are enabling the worshippers in their individual growth in the Lord Jesus. Doctrines were never intended to be divisive, nor is it necessary to make a doctrine, a shrine. It is the cross of Jesus, and what was accomplished there, that is of first importance. If we must battle, our battle should be against Satan and his efforts to divide us. Christians have far more in common with one another than they have differences and many of the differences, when examined, are merely semantics or styles or superstitions. We fear what we don't understand.

There is no cause for fear among those whose names are written in heaven. God is well able to keep us from soul damning doctrines if we trust in him. David prayed for God to protect him, and so should we. "Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge." he said, and went on to say, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." Then he made this statement, "As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight." (Psalms 16:1-3) When we start appreciating and loving one another despite our differences, we are growing up into the fullness of his stature.

I don't advocate abandoning churches, nor do I think that we should all worship in the same style. I do, however, believe that we must love one another. What separates true worshippers from cults, are issues surrounding the person, mission and doctrines of Christ. Many issues such as what is the true nature of the Sabbath, what day if any should be observed, are Christians saved by election, or can a Christian lose the salvation he once embraced, are issues that have divided Christians and caused some to feel superior or have caused others to hate those who disagree with them. If these are as important as some people feel they are, why is there so much disagreement among true hearted, intelligent people who are striving to be true to the word of God?

When and if we finally come to the point where we realize that there is room for disagreement in the body of Christ, and that obedience to the command of our Lord to love one another is more important than agreeing; we will begin to enjoy the people of God from a pure

heart of love. We will then say with David, “As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.”

There is a messianic tone to the words of David in Psalms Sixteen. When David says, “LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure,” my mind goes to the garden where Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matt. 26:39)

Cups were used in a symbolic sense in the Old Testament on many occasions and were used in the sense of being a container from which the contents could be pour or drunk. The cup of the Lord was sometimes spoken of as a cup of wrath as was the case in passages in Psalms, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well as others. It was also referred to as a cup of Salvation. What the cup of the Lord contained is a matter for some speculation, although it is pretty evident that it was primarily a cup of suffering. At some point in the redemptive work of Jesus, he became the sin sacrifice of the world. The guilt of our transgressions was laid on him, and he bore our sorrows and iniquities. Perhaps that was the intended meaning of the cup—that, he was at that point stepping into the role of sin bearer. The full weight of our sin was settling in upon him and he must carry them to his death. The cup was becoming the cup of Salvation from which we as repentant sinners are now permitted to drink.

From that day onward the inheritance of the Lord became the blood bought redeemed church of Jesus Christ. This wasn't David's inheritance except in the prophetic sense, because Jesus was his coming Son. This inheritance, of which David spoke, belongs to Jesus. David too had an inheritance then present, and it too was glorious in the sense that he was king of Israel, the people of God.

As is often the case with the words of the prophets, there is sometimes an immediate application for their words, and sometimes there is also a future application. As we read this Psalm it isn't always clear where the intended meaning is present, future or both, but sometimes it is abundantly clear.

Perusing Psalms reveals Jesus coming before our eyes in passages and phrases. An example of this is the words, “I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” (Psalms 16:7) The expression “at my right hand” was likely meant to refer positionally, in the fact that, as King David made God his constant counselor. He had made the decision to set the Lord before his face at all times, and to walk in the awareness of his presence.

I find it interesting to note that God allows us to make decisions about so many things as human beings. There is a sense in which we can say that we are the masters of our own fate. The decisions we make determine the road we walk on each day of our lives. God is constantly watchful of what is happening to us, and sometimes intervenes in supernatural ways, but the basic road upon which we walk is the result of our decisions. When we receive Jesus, we make him king of our hearts, but even then; the extent that we apply that decision in our daily life depends upon many minute decisions. It is possible to make a philosophical decision to make Jesus king of our hearts, but to never really give him access to the decision making process of our lives. David wanted God to be his counselor and instructor so that his decisions would be made according to the counsel of the Lord.

In this world we decide — that power was given to man in the beginning and never removed. I know this is an objectionable thought to some, but it is true nevertheless. It isn't that God can't intervene in every thought, action and event on this planet, but does he? Obviously, not. If everything were preprogrammed to happen in certain ways, why then would we be constantly scolded for our unbelief, disobedience and lack of vision?

God is God and always will be God. Nothing can ever change that reality. God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; what we think about God can never change him. He is sovereign, and totally self-sufficient. Adam was commissioned by God to take care of the earth. The earth became Adam's domain. God's interaction with Adam and all humanity has been a partnership

of sorts. When Adam sinned, he brought this planet into a condition of being under the curse of sin. God didn't demand that Adam sin, but he left him with a condition that made sin possible. God didn't put a curse on Adam in a fit of rage; rather it was pronounced in advance of the transgression. What happened later further explained what the curse of dying meant in practical application.

When God created Adam in his image, he gave him the power of choice to develop him in character, so that he would emerge as being truly in his image. God wasn't acting from a posture of weakness of any kind when he gave the power of choice to humanity; rather, it is evidence of his strength that he would risk such a thing.

God has established boundaries in which man can govern, but not without being accountable for his actions. Every thought, motive and deed will be called into account. Nothing escapes the watchful eye of God. "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom. 14:10-12) For those who think that everything is preprogrammed, why then are we going to have to give an account of ourselves before the Lord?

Before David was anointed king of Israel, God was their king, then Samuel anointed Saul king, but God rejected Saul as a result of his disobedience. Samuel then anointed David king and in due time he was recognized by the nation as their king. God gave positional authority to David, but retained his authority as God. In the role of king, David elected to keep God in the center of his thoughts and decisions.

In Psalms 16, the Lord Jesus comes before our eyes, when it speaks of his body not being abandoned to the grave, nor, would he (God) let his Holy One see decay. Peter referred to this passage in his famous address to the people of Jerusalem. (Acts 2:27) The occasion was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when Peter reminded them that the body of David was buried and decayed, and that his tomb was still with them. If David had only been speaking of himself, then his words were mere wishful thinking, but they were really prophetic and referred to Jesus and his resurrection.

The result of the sacrificial death of Jesus was that the path of life was made known and now he is enjoying eternal pleasures at God's right hand. What joy there is when people discover this path that Jesus opened before us!

Chapter Eighteen

David Appeals to God for Help

Psalm 17

A prayer of David.

Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer — it does not rise from deceitful lips. May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right. Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin. As for the deeds of men — by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped.

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me.

They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance. They have tracked me down, they now surround me, with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground. They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a great lion crouching in cover.

Rise up, O LORD, confront them, bring them down; rescue me from the wicked by your sword. O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life.

You still the hunger of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children. And I — in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.

In this Psalm David is making his plea to God for help because of the enemies that have risen against him.

This world is a place of struggle. The haves and the have nots are constantly struggling to secure some of the wealth of the world. David had become king and as such had obtained power and wealth. Others seeing his success are filled with envy imagining that he had it all. Little did they know that the wealth of the king is in his people.

People produce wealth by their activity in raising produce, working in industry, and serving the needs of one another. Wealth is not a predetermined quantity that must be divided among the population of the earth, rather; it is constantly changing based on the activity of those who make up the population.

Narrow minded people assume that all has been done that can be done, that the day of opportunity belonged to past generations. Civilizations like trees grow in various ways at different times and seasons.

Using trees as a lesson, we observe that a mature tree has undergone patterns of growth. First it was just a seed that found soil in which to grow, received moisture and nutrients necessary to life, and began to grow. Its growth was in predictable patterns based on the sort of seed that it came from. First the main stock took form with its leaves and then branches with their leaves. Always there has to be a provision for the life function no matter how developed the tree becomes. Whether a tree is a sapling or a fully developed mature tree, the life function must be kept healthy. In every stage of growth after it has established itself as a viable life form, it seeks to reproduce itself in the form of seeds. These seeds when germinated spring to life. They are first the seed, then a strong healthy mature tree, and then a forest of such trees.

Each tree is undergoing constant change, as it grows older the trunk gets bigger and stronger, the branches too must become stronger as they are supporting the new branches on the periphery of the tree. This process continues until enemies begin to attack it, diseases and bugs or perhaps storms. The older trees sometimes outgrow their strength and fall to the ground because either the main structure was not strong enough to hold its weight or it had been weakened by the conditions around it.

Kingdoms are somewhat like that; a population grows perhaps from a single family, to a clan and then to a nation. The strength of the nation is based on the sum of the parts and the sorts of individuals that make up those parts. A healthy nation like a mature tree is constantly working toward the growth of the outer periphery. It's the new growth on the new limbs and branches that keep the tree healthy. Without the new growth, the sap stops flowing and the limbs die. Nations that stop developing new ideas and industries, also die.

David was king but there were some in his kingdom who failed to appreciate their own positions and find new ways to develop their own industries. These individuals were spending their energies on coveting what belonged to another. Like a disease that begins to destroy the host life form, so these individuals are sealing their own doom by bringing down the strength of the nation. Their strength was being spent on making David's life miserable instead of trying to

develop new avenues to increase the wealth of the nation. Every healthy life form moves toward expansion. If it does not it soon dies. When growth ceases to be a priority, death is near.

David saw the danger of this condition around him. Men of callused hearts were rising against him. These men were no longer seeking to be contributors, and thus had become parasites. Instead of supporting the king and giving their talents, energies and wealth to strengthen him, they failed to understand that the strength of the nation begins with the king, thus they turned on him.

David being a man of integrity examined his own heart and life before God and found himself to be righteous. Whatever faults he had, they were not in the arena of integrity. David's conscience was clear and he knew the fault was not in his behavior. His appeal was to God to stand with him and to vindicate him. David knew that his very existence was because God was with him and now enemies were rising up against him, but not in righteousness. These were men of evil hearts callused by sin. Like a life form that is under attack by disease, so these men were threatening the nation's health. David made his appeal to God to vindicate him.

David reminds God in the closing stanza of this psalm that he stills the hunger of those he cherishes, and that their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children. Those who are in right relationship to God and one another can expect to grow in wealth. Wealth comes in many forms, not all financial, but it is wealth nonetheless. David knew that the reward of righteousness was more than what is gained in this world; it is in the realization that those who walk with God will see God.

David also looked forward to the resurrection when on that day he would see the likeness of God. Ah, it is true that we will be like him for we will see him as he truly is. Everyone who is like God has seen God in some way. On that day we will see him clearly, but for now we see him by revelation of the Spirit who reveals him to us in many ways. First, without holiness no one can see the Lord, so we must come repentantly if we want to see him. True holiness begins with the gift of righteousness, and then is manifest as the Spirit enables us to walk with God. As we begin to walk with God in the spirit of holiness, we begin to see him in a multitude of ways. We see him in creation and we see him in revelations of his word.

There are two ways we become acquainted with one another, in our words and in our actions. Actions tell us a lot about someone, but honest words reveal an even deeper depth. Words without actions are meaningless, and actions without words are inadequate.

David had a heart after God and longed for a full revelation of him. He knew that the hunger would be satisfied, but not fully in this life. Growth in this world begins with the discovery of God as the Spirit reveals more and more to us about his nature, his love, wisdom, compassion and care. We will never exhaust all there is to be learned about God in this world. Every revelation about God equips us for new adventures in the arena of life. This results in new expansions in the total wealth we possess. This wealth is spiritual but can also find some tangible expressions.

I am a wealthy man, yet my wealth is not of this world. My wealth has to do with my knowledge of God, my friends and my family. Whatever I enjoy in this world is temporal, but my relationship with the Lord and his people is eternal.

David never sought to be wealthy, only to be a good king. It was for this reason that all generations have honored him. It was for this reason that he was the apple of God's eye! He wanted to keep it that way and needed God to protect him. He wanted to be close to God, to be in the shadow of his wings. He needed God to protect him by rising up against those who threatened him.

The picture I see is that of a mother chicken with chicks and an enemy is near. She will put her wings out to protect her young and at the same time use all her energy to try to frighten the enemy away. If necessary she will attack the enemy with all the fierceness she can muster. This is how David saw himself and his need. He needed God to extend his wing over him and to rise up in a fierce attack mode against his enemies.

Is this where you are today in your life? Do you need him to be your protector? God is ready to stand with those who stand with him. First David made sure he was standing in right relationship with God; then he knew he could appeal to him.

Chapter Nineteen

A Psalm of Gratitude

Psalm 18

For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD.

He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

He said: I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.

The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry. Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.

They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.

You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn.

I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet. You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet. You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes. They cried for help, but there was no one to save them — to the LORD, but he did not answer. I beat them as fine

as dust borne on the wind; I poured them out like mud in the streets. You have delivered me from the attacks of the people; you have made me the head of nations; people I did not know are subject to me. As soon as they hear me, they obey me; foreigners cringe before me. They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.

The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, who saves me from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from violent men you rescued me. Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD; I will sing praises to your name. He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever.

The life of King David was a life of struggle against many enemies. When he came to power the Philistines and the Sidonians occupied the coastal region to their west, the Ammonites to the east, the Moabites to the southeast, and the Edomites to the South with the Aramians to the North. Jerusalem itself was an occupied area right in the heart of the nation.

It took the Lord's mighty power to conquer these nations and deliver the land into the hand of the people to whom it had been given.

In those days the borders were constantly changing depending on the strength of the nations around them. It was the custom in those days for nations to send their armies out in the spring of the year and for them to conquer whatever they could and bring back to their native country whatever booty they could gather. This practice led to many bloody battles and only very strong nations were able to withstand such invasions. It was the threat from these marauders that was the reason for the walled cities and fortresses.

Many of the battles in those days resulted in enormous casualties. It wasn't infrequent for thousands of men to be killed in one day's battle. We think today that warfare is worse because we have guns and bombs but dead is dead whether by bullets or swords. Wars were fought almost entirely in hand-to-hand combat, and their weapons were sword, spears, and arrows. Sometimes they used devices to throw stones and they used battering rams against the walls and gates of fortified cities. Some of the richer and more powerful nations had chariots. War never has been nice, but for many it was a way of life.

In reviewing the list of the kings of the nations of Israel and Judah we see that most of them died before they reached their fortieth birthday! Today, many people are just beginning to live when they reach sixty.

David had lived through many battles and his nation had become strong and well fortified. Now as he looks back on what has taken place, he gives credit to God who has been his protector.

He speaks of God as speaking in earthquakes, volcanic irruption and storms. Sometimes David would listen to running water or waterfalls and imagine he was hearing the voice of God. David was a poet and musician and spoke in the language of poetry.

David had been learning about the God he served and his observations are shared with us. He said of God, "To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty." (Ps. 18:25-27)

David realized that it was a credit to God that he had survived all the challenges of the years. He had been chased by King Saul, falsely accused by enemies and attack by armies. He saw God as a rock or a cave where he had hid, and a shield that had protected him. He credits God with having kept him alive and making his darkness light! God had given him the ability he had and enabled him to run in pursuit of his enemies. He also credited God with the ability to scale walls and climb mountains. It was for this reason that he sang and praised God among the nations. He knew that what had happened here was only the beginning of what was yet to come in the generations yet to follow.

Chapter Twenty

God is Seen in Creation

Psalm 19

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

When God sent Samuel to Jesse's house to anoint a king, he saw what men don't see. David was a remarkable vessel of the Lord. The qualities of his nature were qualities that God could use to develop him into a most remarkable king. Sometimes the very qualities of our natures are also our greatest enemies. David was a mighty warrior, a brilliant strategist, a man of great principles, and a man capable of great tenderness while being merciless against his enemies. He had an appreciation for beauty and God in every aspect of nature. This sensitivity and appreciation for beauty was a quality that made him a great poet and musician, but it also got him into trouble. There are boundaries of behavior that even kings must honor, but on an occasion David allowed his voyeuristic nature to lead him into lust that resulted in an affair with Bathsheba.

David loved God and really saw the value of the commandments of the Lord. It's important to remember that one momentary fling when repented of does not cancel a lifetime of serving the Lord. David kept the law of the Lord before his eyes at all times until his heart was blinded by his carnal desire. He repented later, but judgment must be served. David was the apple of God's eye, but this didn't exempt him from judgment for sinful behavior.

The prevailing rule and worship of David's heart and soul is expressed in this Psalm. In the highest order of praise David lists all the various aspects of God's revelation: law, statutes, precepts, commands, the fear of the Lord and the ordinances.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalms 19:7-11)

David saw these as being of great benefit to those who would embrace them. He saw souls being revived, the simple being made wise, hearts being filled with joy, eyes enlightened and eternal values coming into view. To those who are willing to embrace them there is great reward.

When God gave Israel his commands, it was not to make slaves out of them but rather to give them a chance to live lives of blessing. Lesser men failed to remember this, but David treasured God and his dealings and his worshipful heart enabled him to appreciate what others sometimes resented.

Do you resent God, if so why? Is it that you desire what you believe God is denying you? When God says no, it is because he loves. Some people think that God is against anything that is fun and that if we want it, God is against it. I see God as enjoying seeing his people having a nice time. It is Satan that wants to entice us into sinful pleasures that lead to bondage and destruction. For example, God is a romantic, and enjoys people being romantic, but it is Satan that wants to take the boundaries of morality away from romance so that lives can be ruined by sin.

God provided feast celebrations for the nation of Israel. Aside from the fact that they had deep spiritual implications, they were a time of socializing. People would gather and visit, and rejoice together. They ate together and sang and danced. They gathered as families and went home as families. When it was over they were refreshed and ready to resume their lives.

After pondering the value of God's provision of worship in all its attributes, David examines his own heart and realizes how difficult it is to see ones own faults. Nonetheless, he wanted to at least avoid anything that is going to really be damaging, so he prays that God will keep him from willful sins. I suppose we could say, there are sins and then there are SINS. Truly, all sins are serious in the eyes of God, but willful rebellion is a damning sin because it breaks fellowship with God in a decisive way. Then with these words he ends the Psalm, "Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." (Ps. 19:13-14)

Chapter Twenty-one

May Your Prayers be Answered

Psalm 20

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings. *Selah* May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the LORD grant all your requests.

Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm.

O LORD, save the king! Answer us when we call!

The desire to have God answer when we pray is in the heart of every true seeker. Why pray if God does not hear? Why bother if he never answers?

When Jesus arrived at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, having been summonsed by Mary and Martha, he said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me.” (John 11:41-42) Jesus had already asked his Father for the answer he was about to receive; therefore he called Lazarus from the tomb! He needed to pray on this occasion so that those seeing and hearing would understand, but it wasn’t that he needed to because he had already prayed privately. There was no need for a long prayer before raising Lazarus, just a simple statement so people would know that prayer is what paves the way for action in the Spirit. When Jesus had prayed about Lazarus, there was no doubt about whether God would hear him, God always heard him! Because God heard him, there was no need to repeat the prayer, only a reference to it was appropriate for the sake of those listening.

It’s not the volume of words or how often a prayer is prayed that counts with God, but rather the circumstances of the prayer. Do we pray in faith, that is, in confidence that God will hear and answer our petition? When Jesus prayed it was evidently a two-way conversation. Though we aren’t told about the original prayer that Jesus prayed, we know he did pray and it probably was upon hearing that Lazarus was sick. Jesus conferred with the Father and they were in agreement upon what would be done. Jesus always did what the Father wanted done, in fact, when Jesus performed miracles; he gave the credit to the Father.

When we are in distress, whether physical or spiritual, we need to know that he will hear us. I find it interesting that when David wrote this he wished that the God of Jacob would protect them. You see—it’s our sins that separate us from God and his provisions. This man Jacob was a man who needed grace upon his life because he was deceitful and covetous. Later, after God’s dealings with him his name became Israel, but it’s the Jacob in him that most of us relate to. We need the God of Jacob to protect us just as Jacob did! God wasn’t with Jacob in the beginning because he was such a righteous young man, but rather because God saw a tender heart that wanted to be blessed so much that he went after it, albeit, wrongly.

It seems that there is an underlying assumption that those identifying with the Psalm are people who are genuinely seeking the Lord, people making sacrifices and even burnt offerings in their pursuit of God. As we have already discussed, Zion means barrenness and what is needed is help from the sanctuary. The process of getting help from the sanctuary involves support from Zion. In other words, it’s those times when we are in the most barren experiences of our lives that we trust God the most, and from those experiences, wisdom is gained, faith is increased, and knowledge of his love is given. As we walk with God pursuing our place in his heart, we learn to lay our all on his altar. First we come with our guilt and sins (guilt offering—sin offering), then with our friendships (fellowship offering), then with our sustenance (grain offering) and finally with everything about us as an offering unto him (burnt offering). It’s the burnt offerings that he really wants, that is, those times in our lives when our love for him is expressed in reaffirmation of an all-consuming dedication. It’s great when people praise the Lord in words and songs, but there is no greater eloquence than an action of love. When you do something that cuts across all usual prejudices and natural resistances to act out of the love of God for another human being, it can be said to be an expression of the spirit of the burnt offering. Selah, that is, pause and think on it.

“May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.” (Ps. 20:4) There are two ways of thinking about this phrase, either that God would ratify your desires and grant your plans success or that he would grant you desires and plans so that they will succeed. I recognize my personal ineptitude, and therefore, desire that God will give me godly desires. I know that if he gives me desires that are in accord with his will, the plans I conceive will come from that base and therefore he will bless them.

David says, “we will shout for joy when you are victorious.” (Ps. 20:5) And indeed we will. David wishes that the Lord would grant all our requests, presupposing that our requests will be

appropriate for a holy God to perform. This is a wish and not a promise, just as John wished that his readers would prosper and be in health even as their soul prospered. Its one thing when God promises, and quite another when his servants wish. David gave his wish list, and is confident that God will do accordingly, if indeed the first parts of this Psalm are true that we have truly made the appropriate sacrifices. When the vertical dimension of our lives is in order, the horizontal dimension will follow. When our soul is basking in the prosperity of the knowledge of God's love, all other things come into proper perspective and blessing.

"Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. O LORD, save the king! Answer us when we call!" (Ps. 20:6-9)

Chapter Twenty-two

Victory over Evil

Psalm 21

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

O LORD, the king rejoices in your strength. How great is his joy in the victories you give! You have granted him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips. *Selah*

You welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked you for life, and you gave it to him — length of days, for ever and ever. Through the victories you gave, his glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty. Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken.

Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies; your right hand will seize your foes. At the time of your appearing you will make them like a fiery furnace. In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth, their posterity from mankind. Though they plot evil against you and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed; for you will make them turn their backs when you aim at them with drawn bow.

Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength; we will sing and praise your might.

In Psalms 20, we hear David asking for the desire of his heart and in this Psalms 21 we hear him give thanks because God has been granted the desire of his heart. What he wanted he had received and it was victory over his enemies. God had granted him great victories and a crown of pure gold was his reward.

He asked for life and received length of days and eternal life as well. David was exalting in the Lord for the blessings he was receiving. Not only were the blessings of the Lord being visited upon him in the natural, but in the spiritual as well. He was also receiving eternal blessings.

When God begins a good work in us, it affects both our immediate life and what is to come. Though the enemies that we need to gain victory over are sometimes people and what they plot against us, it is the spiritual enemy that is of greatest concern. Keeping our spirit pure is so vital to our fellowship with the Lord that everything in us that war against that peace must be dealt with as an enemy. The enemies I speak of are those carnal elements of our fallen natures, such as, the whole spectrum of lusts, resentments, irritability, suspicions, and prideful desires and attitudes. As long as any of these control our spirit in any way we will experience defeat at the

most inopportune moments. When you need love to manifest, it will be colored by hate. Inner prejudice will manifest in unkind words or expressions.

These enemies can and must be overcome if we are to have peace with God and one another. The means of victory is twofold. First there is our part; then there is God's part. Always in everything that has to do with our spiritual life these two elements appear; man's part and God's part. We ask, he gives; we knock he opens; we seek he helps us find; we repent, weep, wail and mourn and he lifts us up. We cleanse our hands because we are sinners, but it takes his blood to cleanse the sin from our hearts. In other words, we look after what we should look after, and he looks after what he should look after. We are workers together with him in all things.

When David was under threat from enemies, it was his responsibility to mobilize an army to engage the enemy. David sought the Lord, but his troops fought the battle. David was an expert warrior, but he gave credit to the Lord because he knew his limitations.

Just as David had to remain vigilant and take seriously the threat from enemies within or without, so we too must be vigilant. Victories don't just happen; they are won. Our walk with God is always a two party walk. It takes participation from both of us if we are to walk together. How can two parties walk together unless they agree? This is the essence of fellowship that two are able to walk in agreement. Humanly speaking, two may walk together and not agree on very much, but if there is to be harmony between them, they will avoid what is controversial. For some the field of agreement is very narrow, and the only way they can walk together is to not talk to each other. Others can talk freely and enjoy communion on a variety of subjects. When we walk with God we are to walk in his Spirit. Since God is spirit, we must commune on a spirit level. Since the spirit of man is where all thoughts, desires and motives spring, we must keep our spirit pure to have fellowship with God. God cannot fellowship with what is impure; therefore, keeping vigilance is required to maintain fellowship.

The reason David could be glad with the presence of the Lord was because his heart was in harmony with the heart of God. Since this harmony existed between them, he could safely trust in the unfailing love of God.

There is a day coming when the wicked will be dealt with. It is called the Day of the Lord. On that day the anger of the Lord against evil will burn as a furnace and the Lord will destroy his enemies. Evil men can't succeed against God. To even think so is pure folly. No one gets away with anything; the Day of Judgment will come to all men. We are all appointed to die once, but then comes the judgment. Death is never the end of any matter; it only hastens judgment. Some sins are judged in this life, others are judged in the hereafter, but all are judged.

I have seen people who knowingly took liberties with the principles of holiness, only to suffer great distress either physically, or in withheld blessings. Is this being judged in this present life? I think so. There are those who object to any form of punishment for sins committed by Christians, thinking that grace covers it all. Grace does in the sense of eternal salvation, but God chastises those he loves.

Chapter Twenty-three

David Prophecies the Crucifixion

Psalm 22

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning." A psalm of David.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him — may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him — those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn — for he has done it.

As we read this Psalm, we can't help being called to the final hours of Jesus' earthly life. The very first utterance of the Psalm is reminiscent of the words of Jesus upon the cross as he hung amidst the darkness that had covered the earth for the past three hours, "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Matt. 27:46)

The hours of trial, the denial, the abusive accusations, the deceitful efforts by the elders, the mock trial, the scourging, the mockery taking the form of a coronation (that I believe was a real coronation), and then the cross, the painful spikes being driven through his wrists and feet. Hanging there naked being mocked by those standing there—God must have concluded, it's enough! God had had it, he couldn't allow people to stand there gawking at his son taking all this abuse, so he took away the light of the sun! How did he do it? Was it some sort of eclipse? Perhaps, but I like to think God put his hand over the sun so it couldn't give its light. This was an awful day, yet a day like no other in its wonder. God's son Jesus, yes, God taking the sins of humanity upon himself suffering what we were supposed to suffer!

The prayer for deliverance from this trial must have been going on in the prayer time of Jesus or at least it was a constant cry of his human heart, "Isn't there another way? Why must I suffer and die? Can't we just acquit man on the basis of an apology?" This plan was determined long ago, but as zero hour approached the reality of having to actually live it out was bearing in upon Jesus as he prayed in the garden. There the agony and battle of his heart found final expression as he asked that if it was possible, let the cup be taken away. I'm sure we've all pondered some perplexing problem at one time or another, racking our brain for a suitable answer, but found none. Such was the dialog between Jesus and the Father in the Garden. The greatest mind there is in all existence, the one that designed the heavens, the earth, and all the life forms upon this planet and everywhere else life exists in whatever forms. God supreme, God eternal, God sovereign, God omnipotent—surely he could devise an alternate plan. But no, there was no other

plan and in its final expression, Jesus felt forsaken and all alone. Thus the words upon the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” (Psalms 22:1)

Despite the fact that God couldn't or wouldn't, provide an alternate plan, yet the worship in the heart of the man Christ Jesus never went out! He still praised him, and still loved him and God was still the God of Israel, the one in whom the forefathers had placed their trust, and the one who had delivered them from their many enemies. The holiness of God couldn't be compromised even for love!

Looking toward the event, David speaking as a prophet said, “I am a worm and not a man.” At first glance one might think David was really in a bad state of mind making such a statement, however that wasn't the case. Speaking of the worm was not intended to demean either David or the Lord. Rather it was the metamorphosis that takes place in the worm that is of interest here. This wasn't an earthworm; rather it was probably a maggot that was being spoken of. I have heard it said that this was the species of worm that undergoes a metamorphosis process after which it leaves the carcass having become a flying insect. The spiritual lesson to be drawn here is that though man in his fallen state is drawn to evil as a maggot is to a dead carcass, his destiny is heaven. If there is a connection of thought to Jesus, it must be his role of becoming sin for us so that our penalty would be laid on him. This was accomplished at the cross either in the garden as he prayed concerning the cup that he must drink or at some point after that caused him to cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He took our worminess upon himself, and underwent a metamorphosis in the tomb, coming forth as the blessed Savior in his resurrection body. We become participants in his death, so that we may also be participants in his resurrection.

The substitutionary work that Jesus underwent upon the cross was further described in the words, “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: “He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.” Though Jesus became the recipient of our sin and guilt, he was still Jesus. He had to allow the crowd to verbally abuse him and undergo all the suffering associated with his sacrificial role. He reminded the Father that he had been cast upon God from his mother's womb. Even at that age when it was to soon for decisions to be made, God was his God. Now in the position of being the sin carrier and sin offering for humanity, he doesn't want the Father to be far away, because there is no one to help. Strongmen likened to bulls, strong bulls of Bashan are encircling him. Like roaring lions tearing their prey, they are opening their mouths against him. Such was the condition surrounding the death of Jesus.

What he experienced is further described as being poured out like water, as all his bones are being pulled out of socket. Death on the cross was intended to be a painful agonizing death, a real deterrent to lawless men.

While hanging there in agony of body it felt like his heart was being turned to wax and melting away within him. His strength was ebbing away and his tongue was sticking to the roof of his mouth. There, the band of evil men who pierced his hands and feet, stare at him as his bones stick out. They divide his garments and cast lots for his clothing. Yet the prayer goes on, “Oh LORD, be not far off, O my Strength, come quickly to help me.” Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen. (Ps. 22:19-21) Finally death comes, and he is removed from the cross and laid on the dust of the earth.

The tone of the Psalm changes after verse twenty-one, shifting from the prophetic to the voice of an instructor and exhorter. First the Psalmist promises to declare his name and praise in the congregation, and then exhorts all who fear the Lord to praise him as well. All the descendants of Israel and Jacob are called upon to revere him and to praise the LORD God because he didn't despise the suffering of the Savior! Because of him — “The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him — may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before

him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him — those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn — for he has done it.” (Ps. 22:26-31)

Chapter Twenty-four

The LORD is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

David was a shepherd and as such understood full well the relationship of sheep to their shepherd. Before Psalms 23 comes into play in our lives, we need the message of Psalms 22 that centers upon the redemptive work of Jesus that brings us into a relationship with Jesus, the good shepherd.

With the Lord as shepherd there is no want. Why? Because he makes us lie down in green pastures, that is, daily sustenance; he satisfies our thirst in quiet streams, and he restores our souls. This is the essence of the biblical message, Jesus satisfying the hunger and thirsting of our souls that is part of the process of restoration.

The heart of God longs for the affection that comes from the hearts of those who love him. I don’t know how to adequately convey the message of the love of God for his people, a love so great that constant attention is given to it. You would think that with all that God has to look after, he would only give us a passing glance at best, but no, Jesus told us that even the hairs of our head are numbered, that God even notices sparrows that fall to the ground and informs us that we are of much greater concern to him! How can I tell you that you are greatly loved by God? How can it be expressed that he is yearning for you to come into a closer relationship with him?

Unlike the animals that are here today and gone tomorrow, we are eternal beings. Once the breath of life is received into our lungs, we are without doubt eternal beings. Does this mean that children who die in the womb are not eternal beings? I can’t say for certain, but we know that what caused Adam to be an eternal being was the breath of life.

I lean heavily to the idea that babies in the womb are also eternal beings, that when God breathed into Adam the breath of life he breathed into all of us because we were all in Adam. There is no record that Eve was breathed into; therefore, since she was taken from Adam she was also in Adam at the time of his creation. Though we can’t say for certain what we don’t know, certainly a baby who takes the breath of life is without a doubt a living soul. This is a debate for

the theologians to debate, but I am convinced that the defining moment will come when God reveals all his secrets and wisdom.

As David traversed the paths of life, he realized that he was receiving guidance from the Spirit of God leading him on paths of righteousness but not for his sake, but rather, for the sake of the testimony of God. We are all a part of a bigger drama being played out, the story of redemption and the continuing love of God.

David understood the love and care of God as much as any human being and spoke often of the unfailing love of God. When all alone with his sheep in the midst of the beauty of creation, he looked heavenward pondering the glory of all that has been created. There were no questions in the mind of David about how all this came to be; he believed completely that it was God.

Throughout David's life God and David communed and what was revealed to him was written into songs or Psalms. God also revealed himself to David in the many daily struggles and battles he was called upon to fight. As he wrote this Psalm, we can assume that in his devotional life he was recounting the many experiences of how God had been with him, how he had hungered and thirsted to know God and been satisfied. He had walked through the valley of the shadow of death and found a table prepared for him even there. Everywhere he had been, every trial he had experienced, every battle he had fought, all were a part of the portrait of revelation that God used to reveal his love to David.

David was just a youth when he had been summonsed to return home from the field where he was shepherding sheep to be anointed with oil. As the oil ran over his head the cup of his heart was overflowing with joy even though this was causing him to become the enemy of King Saul. He would often fight real and present enemies, but the oil of God's presence was still upon him. He may have even felt the sensation of that oil while fighting the armies. Those who walk with the Lord having been anointed with the Spirit (what anointing oil represented), often feel this wonderful enabling power while fighting against the wiles of the devil. I, like many who have experienced the anointing power of the Spirit, can testify that when this oil is being experienced, our cup runs over. There is no greater feeling on earth than the presence of the Holy Spirit. When we minister under the anointing of the Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit is wonderfully exhilarating. What is accomplished in the listeners at moments like that has the power to be life changing.

The conclusion is that surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. How could it be otherwise, when God is a part of our life? God spoke to Abraham one day and told him that he was his exceeding great reward. What could possibly be of greater value than to have the Lord God claim you as his possession? What joy there is in the knowledge that we are participants in the blessed hope of the church, that hope that reaches beyond the parameters of this life into the eternal kingdom of God and all that God has purposed? What God has purposed to accomplish eternally is only vaguely alluded to in the scriptures, but on the basis of what we know about the past, we can safely conclude that there is much that has not been revealed. David was content to know that he would one-day dwell in the house of the Lord forever. To those hungering and thirsting for God, the idea of being in his presence forever is totally fulfilling. It is only those who have loves for the world, sin or pleasure that find this idea unfulfilling. David wanted to be close to God while on earth and closer still after leaving this life!

Chapter Twenty-five

Ascending the Hill of the Lord

Psalms 24

Of David. A psalm.

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. *Selah*

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty — he is the King of glory. *Selah*

Nations rise and stake their claims to land and domains, but to whom does it belong after all? What right do we have to claim what is God's? We have been given custodial domain, but not to the exclusion of God. Genesis 1:26-27 says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Psalms 24 begins by reaffirming the authority of God over all the earth. God is the landowner; we are the tenants. He has a right to call everything into account. There is one who has the exclusive right to kingship over all the earth; he is called the King of Glory. God allows man to rule, but not to the exclusion of his divine authority.

There is a place on this planet where God has set his name; it is where Solomon built God's temple. It is commonly believed that it is on Mount Mariah where Abraham offered Isaac. It is Jerusalem the city of David that is where God chose to place his name. It is symbolically the capital city of God's kingdom on earth. When this city was filled with sin, God's heart was grieved, and therefore he sent judgment to cleanse the city. At the time when David became king it was still held by the Jebusites and was believed to be an impenetrable fortress city, but David knew there was a water shaft into the city, so David and his men conquered the city.

Whereas there is an earthly city Jerusalem, there is also a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. It isn't clear to me whether David was referring to the earthly city of Jerusalem or the heavenly city when he wrote about the hill of the Lord, but the Psalm definitely shows the reverence that David had for what is holy. David knew that anyone who would approach God must have clean hands and a pure heart. He must not be an idol worshipper or swear by what is false.

The same is true today. God is still a holy God and requires reverence. Approaching God carelessly with sin in our hearts is to open us to condemnation and judgment. The hill of the Lord would speak to us of the place where God dwells that could be heaven or it could be your heart or your church on worship days. Actually, God is everywhere present, but there are times when we must approach him in a special and deliberate way. When we go to church, some effort goes into the occasion. If our hearts and motives are pure and our purpose is to affirm our faith and worship, we can expect it to be a positive occasion, where God meets with us affirming his love for us.

How should we approach a holy God? I am sure that a repentant heart always pleases the Lord. Repentance is not a one-time occurrence for those who serve the Lord. We may not have a specific deed upon our consciences when we come to the Lord, but repentance is a state of being dependent upon his grace to sustain us. It is a denial that it is by any goodness on our part that we can approach the holy throne of God, but rather, it is because he came and died for us that we can

live in him. Repentance is a condition of humbling ourselves in his presence, whereas, rebellion is pride. Repentance is worship on the highest order because it says that no matter how good we are we still are not good enough to approach him who lives in unapproachable light.

We are able to approach the hill of the Lord when our demeanor is right for the occasion, but what is really needed is vindication from God our Savior! We do what we can do, wash our hands, that is, seeking cleansing in the arena of our daily endeavors. Are we doing our best at our work? Are we treating those around us lovingly and respectfully? Is our heart pure, or is it full of envy, lust, bitterness, anger or resentment? Are we truly thankful to God for life no matter whether it is pleasant or full of pain and suffering? Do we see hardship and pain as an opportunity to apply the principles of the overcomer and thereby grow in spiritual strength? We need to have full recognition that we need God to be our Savior and believe in him to come to us in saving grace and to grant to us the gift of his Holy Spirit to enable us to stand in the joy of the Lord.

It takes the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to be able to truly give thanks for what is happening to us, when everything in us wants to sin the sin of bitter anger and resentment. To truly love those who are acting like enemies, taking advantage of us in every possible way, hating us, using us, mocking us and tormenting us with their attitudes and actions, takes real courage and strength.

No wonder Jesus assigned such wonderful rewards for those who are overcomers! He knew full well what we face daily if we are in a hostile environment; he was mocked, spit upon, beaten nearly to death, then lead out to be nailed naked to a cross. He did it for us because he loved us, even if we were once a part of the mocking crowd. His words, Father forgive them, were to us as well.

When Jesus admonished his disciples to pick up their cross and to follow him, the words were not idol words. He knew loving our enemies is painful to our flesh. To identify with the one who is led as a sheep to the slaughter is painful to even contemplate. Our fallen nature wants to react to those who are hurting us, and being passive is not what the wisdom of the world advocates. We, however, can do it if it is the right thing to do.

There is a time to be passive, and there is a time to act aggressively against evil. The Holy Spirit teaches us to know the difference. If a criminal is acting against us in the act of a crime, we should do all we can to protect those around us and ourselves.

There are however, those instances where we are powerless to change the external events around us, but we can control the internal events. This is what the overcomer does; he controls the internal events and matters of the heart. This is what Jesus did. The external events of the cross experience had to happen because it was why he came into this world. He came to die a sin sacrifice for the world, and therefore passivity was required even though he had the power to change it. Love demanded silence and pain was part of the result. Can we identify with such a sacrifice when love demands our silence?

The Psalmist David stated that the King of glory was coming; then he asked the question, "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle." Not only was David foretelling the coming of Christ to Jerusalem, but in the personal sense was foretelling how it is that he comes to each of us when we accept him as our Lord. When he came to Jerusalem, he came to do battle against the demonic grip of Satan and sin upon our souls. He defeated Satan's claim against our souls by becoming our sin sacrifice. When we accept that sacrifice, he then enters our heart and life and immediately starts to do battle against the sins that have bound us. He does this first by granting us the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to live an overcoming life. Then he begins to teach us what it is to be an overcomer.

"Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty — he is the King of glory." Once more the Psalmist draws us to the question, who is the King of glory? Then in a statement full of theological implications makes the bold statement that it is the Lord Almighty. Here is a

scripture validating the claim of Jesus to being God the Son. The Jews didn't believe that a man could be the Son of God. They rejected his claim as being blasphemous, yet their own scriptures said it would be so. In the language of poetry David told them to lift up their heads and grant entry to this king, because he is the King of glory.

We too must do the same. Because Jesus is God incarnate the Savior of our souls, he has a right to the throne of our hearts. To reject him is fatal. There is no other name that believing in, has the power of forgiveness of sins, and therefore, access to heaven. This is the message that sets Christianity apart from all other religions. No other religion offers a valid redemptive sacrifice; therefore, those who adhere to them are left guilty before God, and therefore, will be judged for their sins.

How tragic that people seeking eternal life, yet rejecting the Savior, are left guilty before God! It isn't necessary for it to be that way, the price of Salvation has been paid in full; it is finished. All that remains is acceptance of the gift of eternal life by believing in him. Lift up your heads and give Jesus access to your heart!

Chapter Twenty-six

David Humbly Entreats the Lord

Psalms 25

Of David

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great. Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

Frequently David expressed his dependency upon the Lord especially regarding his enemies. He was concerned that he would in some way be put to shame; therefore, he went to the Lord with that concern.

The higher one climbs the ladder of success the more vulnerable one becomes. There is always someone who wants what you have or to be what you are. This is the history of kings and successful people. Living within the boundaries of truth and law becomes more necessary as you become more visible. What insignificant people do when no one is noticing or caring becomes very significant when you have enemies who are looking for an occasion to discredit you. When people who have been insignificant suddenly become significant they are in danger of doing something that can be used to discredit them because they are not accustomed to being under the scrutiny of prying eyes and microscopic analysis. People in high profile positions may do what is acceptable in common life situations, but not acceptable now that they are high profile.

David was aware of this danger and sought the Lord to instruct him. Appealing to the love and mercy of God, David wanted to be shown God's ways. God is very aware of the viciousness of humanity. He also knows what it is like to be scrutinized by enemies. We sometimes speak of double standards, but like it or not, they exist. People of the world never analyze Satan's conduct, but they are always analyzing God's! Politically liberals are always criticizing conservatives and holding them to standards they themselves don't observe; likewise Christians are also held to standards that worldly people make no attempt to live by.

"Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior," (Psalms 25:2-5) David prayed. Wisdom begins with the acknowledgement that God is the source of all true knowledge. Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and gave some to Adam to eat as well; therefore, we have an abundance of the knowledge of evil. What we need is the knowledge of good that comes from knowing God and his ways. The knowledge of evil abounds where people are following Satan, but the knowledge of good comes from God alone. To truly know good; we must know God. He must teach us his ways and show us his path so we will know the way we are to go. God is also the source of spiritual light, and getting away from him results in walking in darkness.

There must have been a period of time in the life of David when as a youth he had been rebellious, though it is not known what this may have entailed. It evidently was on David's mind as he wrote this Psalm and he knew he stood guilty before God, but he also had learned about the love of God and therefore desired to be dealt with according to love, not justice. I, like David, do not want God to judge me on the basis of law or justice, but rather, I too appeal to the goodness of God and his love that forgives my sins. Because God is good and upright in all his ways, he instructs sinners who will listen to him, concerning his ways. If we will humble ourselves and listen, he will teach us what is right.

The problem so many people have is that they think God should listen to them. They are so intent on defending themselves that they can never receive teaching. These are the ones that will be assigned to utter darkness, torment and agony. Sin has made us selfish and self-seeking. We want what we want and if it means that we must make a pretense of humility, we can do that, so long as the end result is that we get our way!

God made a covenant with Israel that was a sort of peace agreement. He would grant prosperity upon their goods, animals, servants, and their own bodies, if they would agree to obey him. If, however, they disobeyed him then all the results of the curse of sin would come upon them. The whole world is under the curse of sin. It is for this reason that there is such a spirit of violence in the world. This world is full of conflicts, struggles against inclement conditions, disease, pain, plagues, infestations and difficulties of every sort. God made a deal with Israel that if they would serve him faithfully, that many of these conditions would be held in suspension. The conditions are still here, but God's hand holds those who love him in his love and care. Some people believe that they are living free of the curse, but they are not. If we were living free of the curse of sin that is upon the whole world, we would never have to labor, crops would grow voluntarily requiring minimal care, childbirth would be pain free and there would be no sickness or death. In this world, obviously, no one lives that free of the curse. What Jesus did for us in redemption has resulted in our being able to enjoy God as being our God.

When we received salvation, we received a package deal. The package includes forgiveness of sin, restoration of fellowship with God, a glorified body free of disease, immortality, total release from all desires and inclinations to sin, total perfection and holiness, the enabling power of the Holy Spirit and full knowledge of God.

Obviously we don't experience all of this in full measure in this world; therefore, it is called the "blessed hope". What we receive is the earnest of our inheritance, or a sampling of it. In this world we receive gifts of provision, healing, instruction, special empowerment or spiritual gifts and such like along with the witness of the Spirit that we are the sons of God. None of these are total in nature, but they are wonderful to experience! For example, I have experienced divine healing, gifts of the Spirit in operation, the enabling power of the Spirit helping me overcome many aspects of my fallen nature, but none of these is totally complete. I still have to deal with a body that is aging, a mind that is slow to comprehend, a memory that fails at times, weariness, and many such impediments common to life in this world. I do enjoy the quickening of the Spirit, strength to carry on, special provisions from my loving Father, but never total release from all the aspects of the curse upon this world.

There is a theological debate about whether healing is in the atonement package or not, I say, of course it is, but not like some people think. It is not a guarantee that everyone who prays for healing will be healed in this world. It is however, a guarantee that everyone who has received salvation also receives healing. When we are called to be with the Lord, we will receive the full package and all the contents will be immediately experiential. We will have a body incorruptible, the wealth of heaven will be for our use, and God will be manifestly in fellowship with us.

In this world we are to lay hands on the sick, anointing them with oil, and the prayer of faith will save the sick, (grant them salvation) and the Lord will raise them up. The question of course is, what did James mean by the word sick? The word used can mean physically or spiritually sick (To be weak, infirm, to be sick, deficient in strength, to be weak in faith, to doubt, hesitate, be unsettled, timid or contemptible.) The theme of what was being spoken of was about sin rather than physical impairment. If the intended meaning is that all are healed in this present life, then everyone should be immediately healed. This is not the case, however. This does not say that none of those who are prayed for are healed; actually many are healed in the present sense! When reading the English translations it is easy to see why some would believe that James was declaring physical healing to all that are sick in body. Contextual consideration and studies in Greek seem to indicate that he was speaking of people who were in a state of discouragement or despondency, and therefore under attack, thus forgiveness of sins comes into view as such conditions are often the result of sinful living.

Sadly, some people who are intent on having an immediate healing of physical ailments have left the faith and entered into the realm of psychic phenomenon.

What James was apparently trying to communicate was that the elders were to try to lift people out of their sense of defeat, despair, discouragement and unbelief into the joy of the Lord and to encourage them to be full partakers of the provisions God has made for us as believers.

What God gives in the here and now are gifts of physical healing, samplings of eternal provisions, sadly not total, however, what we get in the here and now is our daily portion. Interestingly, a person may be healed of terminal cancer or some other deadly disease, but still have other physical problems that were not healed. Or, God may grant a special provision of strength rather than healing, does this make God less than loving? This is not meant to minister discouragement or doubt of the validity of the healing ministry, only to bring comfort to those who are troubled because someone has accused them of being less of a Christian because they lack healing in some area of life. Some have done all that James instructed thinking that they or someone they loved should have received healing for some disease, but healing didn't come. Some have even died not having received healing in this present life.

Smith Wigglesworth, a famous evangelist of the recent past, had a very remarkable healing ministry. It is noted, however, that he had to wear very thick glasses and that though some of the

most remarkable miracles ever recorded happened under his ministry, he himself still did not receive healing for his ailing eyesight in this present life. I once had a friend who was a neighbor pastor that was almost totally blind. We were talking one day and he told me about what the Lord had revealed to him on this subject. He was at the funeral of a man who had a withered hand and the pastor preaching the sermon mentioned in passing that this withered hand is now whole in heaven picking daisies. It was at that moment that the Lord quickened this truth that healing is a matter of time, not will it happen in the here present. Yes, everyone who receives salvation receives healing, when it will manifest is a matter of when. In this world we receive a down payment portion of our inheritance in Christ with various manifestations, but no matter how much of our inheritance we avail ourselves of or receive as a grant from the Lord, the full measure is still laid up for us in heaven.

I am convinced that all receive healing in a very total sense eternally. Jesus was beaten, bled and died paying the full price for our physical health eternally. In the here and now we seek healing provision as a part of divine blessings that will be given to us without measure when we are in heaven with the Lord. What is given to us now is a taste of the fruit, and thus encouragement to keep on going on. The heart of the Father is that we might all receive abundantly of his love and blessing both in the now and in the future.

There is no doubt that when we are living in the Spirit that we are healthier, stronger, we heal more quickly, are more radiant and alive even unto death, than those who fall away from the joy of the Lord.

My wife has suffered from migraine headaches since she was a young girl. She has been prayed for by many people, and on occasion has received a lifting of the pain and a healing of the present migraine. Still she suffers repeatedly. Job's comforters come and give their theories about lack of faith, or sin in ones life, but every time the Spirit moves upon her in healing power, relief comes. When the spirit does not move in this way she continues to suffer.

I confess that there is much I don't know about how the gifts of healing are administered by the Holy Spirit, but I do know it is he who does the administering. If it were up to me, everyone would be instantly healed! The reality is, not everyone is either instantly or eventually healed in this world, but all who name the name of Jesus receiving the gift of salvation and are healed eternally.

Eternal healing is a vital part of the deal. There will not be any lame, impaired, blind, deaf or sinful people in heaven. While still in this world, people will go on having to work for a living, deal with rebellious children, teach people the ways of the Lord, and, yes, sometimes suffer in their bodies. God may heal our serious disease, but we still may get blisters on our feet. He may heal our blisters, but not our deadly disease. He may grant us special enabling, but not healing.

You may ask, what about the scripture that says that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil? I ask, did Satan curse the world or did God? Did God tempt Eve or did Satan? Satan did the tempting, and God did the curse. That is Biblical fact. If disease is part of the curse, then God put it here. This is a fact that God does not deny. Satan does do some things however. Demonic bondage is a work of the Devil, and diseases connecting to the presence of demons are the result of the work of the Devil.

Basically what Satan's role is, is to get people away from the protecting hand of God. Walking in disobedience can result in a lifting of the hand of God's blessing upon our lives. Many people have walked in willfulness and disobedience and in doing so have walked out from under the protective hand of God.

In my younger years I live around farm animal and chickens. It was always interesting to watch hens with their chicks and how they would care for them. They would always keep them close and would hunt for food for them and when it was time to sleep they would snuggle under her where there was protection and warmth. I think that is a good illustration of what the care of God is all about. If we wander away from him and fail to trust in him then all hostilities of the

world are there as a constant threat to our well being. If a hawk swoops down on us and snatches us away, don't blame the hen!

When we get into the arena of assigning blame, we enter a quagmire of misunderstandings resulting from, wrong teachings and insufficient knowledge of what God is doing. It is far too simplistic to assign our failures to lack of faith or sin in our lives, both of which are hindrances in our walk with God. Fact is, when we walk away from a close walk with God, whether through sin or neglect, we are vulnerable to whatever dangers lurk in our environment of life. We must live in the protection of closeness with because he sees from the perspective of full knowledge. We lack the perspective of full knowledge and therefore desperately need the insight given by the Holy Spirit. We should always avoid the blame game, and simply seek the Lord and his goodness to be manifest in us and upon us.

We do not live under the blessings and curses of the law, but rather the covenant of love. While in this world we are encouraged to be content with the knowledge that God is enabling us to live in the midst of a cursed world, we are free to draw water from the well of Salvation. To me that means that I am privileged to draw upon my eternal inheritance without fear of overdrawing my account! When I need finances I ask for them, when I need healing I ask for healing, when strength is needed I ask for strength. I don't fret over the difficulties of this life, but I ask for divine enabling.

Jesus, though sinless, still walked on paths where other men walked, endured the same heat of the day and cold of the night. He worked for a living while in Nazareth waiting the time for his earthly ministry. He had to struggle against the same conditions that we struggle against because; the curse is upon this world. In his ministry he endured the same things we endure, but he demonstrated that he was Lord of Heaven, and as such could set aside the limitations of this world whenever the situation and purpose of the Father allowed it.

I do not live worrying about where my limitations are, but rather rejoice in the knowledge of God's love. God delights in blessing his children and David rejoiced in the prosperity of his blessing. He said, "Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare." (Psalms 25:12-15)

Though David was rejoicing in the provisions that God had placed in his life, he still looked forward to the release of his feet from the snare. (Feet mean walk or daily life in Christian vernacular.) Do you struggle with seeming contradictions in your life? Do you wonder how it is that you can be so blessed and still have shackles upon your feet? David did, and yet his faith was that one-day release would come.

Paul also struggled with what he called a thorn in his flesh. Wisely God never revealed what that thorn was, though some think they know. Personally I connect it to the crown they put on Jesus the day of his crucifixion. In Paul's life in God he got to close to the crown, meaning, he was so close to Jesus, that a thorn from the crown pierce is flesh too! Paul needed it because he had an apparent weakness to become prideful.

In the book of Judges, is the parable of the trees that went looking for a king to rule over the forest. They went to two trees and then to the grapevine and asked each of them if they would rule over the forest. Each declined stating that that wouldn't be possible because they weren't created with the characteristics of a king. Each was created for a different purpose, and the implication was that they would have to abandon that to become king of the forest and that it would require changes they didn't wish to make. Finally they went to the thornbush or bramble and asked if it would become the king of the forest. The thornbush replied that it could be possible if the trees of the forest could put their trust in his shadow.

Herein is the principle of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came as the thornbush to be the king of human hearts. The forest of the parable had stately cedars and strong oaks as well as lesser

trees. Nevertheless they must all be willing to come and humble themselves in the shadow of thorn bush. What that meant was that the trees had to change, not the thornbush! Jesus went to the cross wearing a crown of thorns. He had been crowned king in Pilate's court and a sign had been placed over him on the cross that he was Jesus, the king of the Jews. He was more than that however, and the day of that revelation will fully come on the day when he sits to judge the world.

The crown of thorns is the symbol of the kind of authority Jesus exercises in the Kingdom of Heaven. The rule is, he doesn't change, but his subjects must! I believe that the thorn in the flesh of Paul was appropriately in his flesh, because it is the flesh that is the enemy of the authority of Christ! It is the fallen nature that must be deemed dead and, in Paul, it was the abundance of revelation that sought to ignite a fleshly manifestation of pride. The thorn was a reminder of who he served. Thorns never hurt the spirit of man, only the flesh! For example, sometimes people who are being used of God in healing begin to abuse those who fail to receive healing and when they get sick and are denied healing; they realize that Jesus is still in charge. I believe Paul was living so close to the crown of Jesus that one of the thorns got into his pride dealing it a deathblow.

The more humble we become, the closer we get to the crown, and the closer we get to that crown, the more the flesh wants to seize the opportunity to manifest in carnal pride! The greater the revelations, the greater the challenge to remain in the posture of humility! Thorns remind us of our dependency upon Jesus. It is in our weakness that he is made strong within us! No matter what a thorn might be in life, it reminds us that Jesus is in charge, and that authority in the kingdom is not authority over the king.

We have been given authority over the power of darkness as members of the body of Christ, but when it comes to our functions in the kingdom, we are totally subject to our king. If our flesh is not deemed totally dead, he knows it, and he will deal with it.

The closer we get to the crown of Jesus the more we seem to find difficulty. David prayed to the Lord, "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you." (Psalms 25:16) You would think that with success David would be enjoying the friendship of many, and that he would be comfortable in life, but such was not the case. The Apostle Paul too walked close to the crown and had a similar result. Instead of having the applause of his friends, he was often criticized. His enemies became fiercer as his ministry flourished. Those who walk with Jesus are often misunderstood, misquoted, rejected, analyzed, criticized, discerned and judged. If a flaw is found, it is cause for contempt!

David felt the pain of loneliness; whom could he trust? Were any true friends or were all using his kindness to gain personal advantage? The more successful or rich a person becomes, the more false friends seem to accumulate. Perhaps with years of experience David had become more aware of this. In youth we don't see it that much, but with years come experience and innocence is lost. David longed to be free of the burden of awareness of his troubles.

It wasn't just David that was suffering due to association with the purposes of God. All Israel suffered too. True shepherd that he was, he also longed for the salvation of the nation. He said, "Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!" Jesus too was aware that his followers would suffer persecution and be rejected. The day is coming, however, when we will receive rewards for our faithfulness. One day soon this present suffering will become history, and a new day will have dawned!

We serve a God of new beginnings, every day has a sunrise, every winter is followed by spring, and every difficult circumstance in life comes to an eventual end, then comes a new beginning.

Chapter Twenty-seven

A Good Conscience before God

Psalms 26

Of David.

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth. I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O LORD, proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds. I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.

Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes. But I lead a blameless life; redeem me and be merciful to me.

My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD.

Is David writing about himself or the coming Christ? I suppose he is writing about himself, but the tone of it is cause for wondering. Perhaps this was written in the earlier years of David's life before his fall into sin with Bathsheba or perhaps before he took a census of the nation. Sometimes we as people think we're doing just fine in our walk with the Lord, then something happens and out of seemingly nowhere comes some ugliness that exposes a heart that is harboring sin of some sort. David declares blamelessness and then invites the Lord to try him, examine his heart and mind.

It seems that he was in the midst of some very trying circumstances and was being lumped together with evildoers and wanted God to defend him. By and large, what he was saying was no doubt true, but when we ask God to research our heart and mind, we are asking for a revelation of truth rather than comparative analysis. We tend to compare ourselves to those around us to see how we are doing spiritually. We feel smug and confident in our status with God if we feel that we are doing better than most people we know are.

I am not saying that David shouldn't have asked for such analysis, but I shudder to think of what such a request might reveal in any of us. I have learned through hard trials and difficult circumstances that what I am I am by the grace of God and the power of his might.

If these words coming from David were a declaration of personal righteousness, then they sound strikingly familiar to the words of the Pharisee that Jesus spoke of who prayed in the temple. (Luke 18:9-14) If on the other hand he was talking prophetically about the sinless life of Jesus every word was true.

Because Jesus took my place in crucifixion, I now stand in the righteousness of Jesus and can pray this sort of prayer and have it be true. It is not based on me, however, but rather on Jesus' life because; it is the record of his righteousness that is now my record. This is what the amazing gift of salvation is all about, that though flawed I am now declared righteous.

There is some validity in self-examination before God on the basis of our conduct. David wanted to please the Lord and was asking the Lord to examine him because to the best of his knowledge he is doing what is right, certainly he is not slipping around seeking the advice of the wicked or befriending the wicked. There are some things we can say concerning our personal

conduct that we know to be true, but does that make us righteous? The Pharisee that prayed in the temple made some sweeping statements regarding his conduct with reference to the law, statements that Jesus left unchallenged. Did that make him righteous? No. On what grounds was he then unrighteous? Simply that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that we all are therefore guilty and need a redeemer. David too, needed a redeemer, though to the best of his knowledge he was blameless in the matter that was his immediate concern.

Have you ever been verbally attack by someone and what was said was nothing but lies? Or have you been lumped together with a group and been accused by association? Maybe you're a politician and someone has attacked your credibility by saying, "all politicians are corrupt." Resenting such attacks is normal, but defenses against them are not always easy. It is in times like this that we need divine help.

Did David need to prove innocence before God to secure his help? I think that a lot of people feel that they do. Now, in this Psalm, David may not have intended it to sound that way, and likely when read in Hebrew it sounded different than it does in English. He may have intended it to be more of a recitation of what he feels he has done right, but it hasn't helped his cause, therefore he is making his appeal.

With the advantage of all that has been taught in the New Testament, we are able to understand that God acts on the basis of grace rather than some legalistic consideration. We understand that when we come to the Lord in humility asking for his favor, we are more likely to get an answer, than when we come declaring our innocence.

There are, however, times when we come to the Lord recanting all we have done in a matter, not to establish our innocence, but rather seeking the counsel of the Lord. We are in effect saying, "This is what I have done, is there something more that I should have done?"

When all has been said and done, we will stand in the great assembly and praise the Lord.

Chapter Twenty-eight

David Seeks Favor Based on Relationship

Psalm 27

Of David.

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence.

I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD

In this world enemies are ever present it seems, and troubles afflict our lives. They change from time to time, but as soon as one difficulty is solved another seems to take its place. Why such problems when one lives in the Promised Land? Isn't it supposed to be the land of peace, love, joy and safety from all our enemies? Wasn't David God's appointed leader; weren't these God's people? Why then was David constantly writing Psalms of appeal to God for deliverance from enemies?

The Promised Land, though a geographical location was and is more importantly a spiritual condition. Enemies are the catalysts that bring us into relationship with the Lord. If we never have an enemy, or if we never have difficulties, why do we need to trust the Lord? Enemies and troubles remind us that we need to remain in right relationship to the Lord. When we are in right relationship with the Lord, we are safe in his care. That doesn't mean that enemies are not all about us, or that troubles are not present, it means that we are protected from harm and are receiving counsel and guidance with strength for each task. Living in the Promised Land is living in peace, love, and joy despite all efforts against us. Living in the Promised Land is living in faith. That is why we have peace; that is why we can love our enemies; that is why we can face difficulties that seem overwhelming, because he is our protector, provision and counselor.

David declared the status of his faith by saying, "The LORD is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. (Psalms 27:1-4)

David learned about the power of God and from the beginning had trusted the Lord. It was his faith that enabled him to face Goliath and it was his faith that had sustained him against all sorts of enemies. Enemies are faithful creations and David still had them, but his desire was to seek the Lord. In this Psalm, David pulled back the curtain of his innermost being and exposed for all to see where his heart really was, he wanted to dwell in the tabernacle of the Lord. It takes real faith to feel secure enough to go to the temple and make sacrifices with joy when your enemies are all about you seeking an opportunity to do you in! Yet, that is what David did. With joy and singing, David sought the counsel of the Lord.

We are no longer victims groping for answers among the crushing masses. When we are walking in the counsel and protection of the Lord, we are safe and secure. You may think that no one knows or cares what is going on in your heart and mind, but I can assure you he does!

As David concludes his Psalm he reaffirms his faith, "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." And then he gives this counsel, "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD." (Psalms 27:13-14)

Chapter Twenty-nine

Keep the knowledge of the Lord Pure

Psalm 28

Of David.

To you I call, O LORD my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit. Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.

³ Do not drag me away with the wicked, with those who do evil, who speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts. Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back upon them what they deserve. Since they show no regard for the works of the LORD and what his hands have done, he will tear them down and never build them up again.

⁶ Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.

⁸ The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.

There is a reoccurring theme in the Book of Psalms, a plea for mercy indicating a consciousness of sin that never seems to go away. David is concerned that God will not drag him away with the wicked.

The author of Hebrews noted this continual need to make sacrifices, day after day, because the blood of bull and goats couldn't take the guilt of sin from their consciences. God gave the system of sacrifices to enable them to seek forgiveness, though full forgiveness was deferred, they could seek mercy, and mercy was granted.

There were some, however, who didn't deserve mercy because evil was a condition of heart and life. David didn't want to be counted as being among them, but rather wanted them to get what they deserved. Forgiveness of sins was not possible in the eternal sense because an effectual sacrifice had not been offered. The only sacrifices that were offered were substitutionary sacrifices, yet forgiveness based on an appeal for mercy would defer punishment in light of God's commitment to an effectual sin sacrifice for the sins of the world.

This is the glory of the Gospel message; sin has been eternally forgiven by the death of the sinless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ our Lord! This sacrifice was retroactive to all those who made sacrifices to God either according to the law or according to the knowledge they had about what God wanted. The need for a sacrifice to atone for sins was known to all, going back to Adam and Eve after the fall when God slew an animal and made a covering for them. What was communicated to Adam concerning sacrificing and how it was carried out, is not known in the Biblical account, but because God used the skin of an animal it would of necessity require the death of the animal. It then became an acceptable covering speaking symbolically of the covering that would one day be granted by the righteousness of Jesus. The leaves they sewed together were inadequate to hide their sinfulness because they spoke of human effort. Right from the start, human effort was judged to be inadequate and no amount of good effort could take away sin. From that time on in the Biblical record we see righteous men sacrificing according to the knowledge they had and God remained their God based on that obedience. Heathens, however, who concocted their own concepts of God as expressed in rituals involving idols were not acceptable no matter what they sacrificed, because they were not being offered to the one true God or according to his commands.

Sin is a condition that is upon all men from the fall of Adam onward. It's a condition of heart before it becomes a condition based on actions. People sin because they are sinners, and they are sinners because they were born that way.

In the present time there is an ongoing debate about homosexuals, were they born that way and therefore manifest the behaviors, or are the behaviors because of some influence upon them? Some say it is simply sin and therefore they are guilty and must change. The reality is that all human beings are born with the lack of spiritual life as a result of the fall. This condition causes an internal lack and predisposition to a large variety of maladies. What is henceforth manifest will be determined by a variety of conditions; training, friendships, opportunity, education both

religious and secular, and internal desires based on an inherited predisposition. It is for this reason that all the debaters have some truth in their corner, so to speak.

The Apostle Paul spoke of this reality by pointing out that from Adam to Moses there were no commands given that could be broken. Nevertheless, he states, death reigned from Adam to Moses but not because they broke a command, rather it is because the problem is internal not external. Sin is therefore the evidence of the lack of the Spirit of Eternal Life. Men desiring to please God received pardon and help based on their acceptance of the provisions God made available to them.

Since all men have a common origin, all men and nations had the same knowledge of God in the beginning. Men wandered from the knowledge of truth as time went by and few sought to stick with the original revelation of God choosing rather to concoct their own ideas about God, hence false religions resulted. These false ideas no doubt were the result of Satanic influence upon them as they sought to find a truth outside the established religion of their forefathers. Rebellion against established truth leads to openness to spiritual experiences that come from fallen spirit beings known as demons. Demon spirits accommodate the desire of those seeking an experience of a spiritual nature without going to the one true God. Such individuals are thus open to suggestion and are accommodated with all sorts of perverse visions, ideas and even tangible evidences as demons seek to weave a web of deceit upon those who are searching erroneously.

In our world today archeologists are seeking to explain ancient history based on their findings, but often misinterpret what they find. Those who lack spiritual life are left to the same sort of vain imaginations as men of old. I have read their explanation of how the Bible came to be in which they state that the Jewish nation borrowed ideas about God from the heathens and refined them into a more acceptable concept. The exact opposite is true however; the heathens all had the same knowledge in the beginning, but the process of deterioration corrupted that knowledge. The reason the knowledge of the forefathers of the Jews was similar was because the heathen still had some of the same knowledge in practice.

It is a scientific fact that everything is in a state of deterioration and dissipation except where the spirit of life is present. This is why we are seeing a spiritual decline in our present world. The source of the Spirit of Eternal Life has been rejected or relegated to just another road to heaven. The tendency to deteriorate spiritually is common to all men, and it is only because God has been faithful to send messengers of truth that any true spiritual knowledge has survived. It is not the knowledge of the truth that changes the heart of man however; it is the power of the living Christ that changes the internal heart of man.

Holy men of God have been sent to generation after generation to call men back to the pure knowledge of God. This is quite opposite to current thinking about evolutionary processes, God always starts out with a pure revelation. The knowledge of God is not an evolutionary process, but deterioration is. The more we “evolve” the more corrupt we become. God’s call to mankind is a call back to the pure revelations already given. Satan’s call on the other hand, is a call to some new idea that is really not new at all, but rather, a call to all the failed ideas of the past. There is a growing fascination with ancient religions of the heathen, but they only lead us farther from the pure truth of God. The more Satan is able to convince society that openness is desirable, the more successful he is in corrupting our society.

Whenever we call on the name of the Lord from a heart that desires to know him and his ways, he will hear us! The LORD granted mercy to David because he sought to be different from the wicked who harbored deceit in their hearts. They would be dragged away into eternal judgment, but David sought mercy and God heard his cry. No one need be dragged away into judgment because, salvation is a ready provision to all who will accept it. Before any work of transformation can begin in anyone’s life there must be an acknowledgement of God through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus. This is the prerequisite of all that is to follow. Everything God wants to share with his people comes after salvation becomes a reality.

Once we are safely included into his kingdom, he then is our strength and shield. Our hearts can safely trust in him leaping for joy as we give thanks to him in song.

David concludes his song by singing, “The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.”

Chapter Thirty

Give Glory to the Lord

Psalm 29

A psalm of David.

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, “Glory!”

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.

How great is God? What is the measure of his stature? How great is his intelligence? What are the limits of his power? Where can we go to find him? In his temple all cry, Glory!

We ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. The Lord is splendid in his holiness, and he rules all he has created! All it takes is the voice of the Lord to do wonders beyond human comprehension. We listen and we hear the voice of the LORD, the majestic powerful voice of the LORD as he thunders over the waters. His voice breaks the cedars and causes the forests of Lebanon to skip like a calf! The voice of the LORD causes lightning to flash and the desert to shake. Even the mighty oaks are twisted and the forest is striped bare! In all of this wonderment the people of God cry, “Glory!”

All of this display of power and glory is for the world to see and the righteous to revel in. There comes a time in the life of the righteous when the outward displays of might and power no longer communicate the voice of the Lord to us, we must listen for a still small voice. The prophet Elijah had to learn that lesson. He was sent to Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God to hear from him. The Lord spoke to him to go out of the cave because he was about to make an appearance. Then a mighty wind came up with such fury that it tore the mountain. Afterward there was an earthquake and then fire, but Elijah didn't discern the Lord in any of these. Finally there was a whispering voice, and Elijah knew it was the Lord.

God is great and his voice is mighty and powerful, but he still speaks gently to his people. There is a purpose in all the outward displays of power and might, but those are not intended for the people of God. We are invited to come close to him where he can speak softly to us. It is sin that separates us from God, and the gulf it creates is so great a mighty voice is needed so sinners might hear him!

Once our sins have been washed away in the power of the shed blood of Jesus, we can enter the presence of the Lord and no displays are needed to know we are in his presence. We can whisper and he hears us, and he whispers and we hear him! The closer we are to him the softer his voice and ours become. We don't have to shout at God, but shouting at the devil is appropriate. We shout, "Get out of my space Satan, you're not welcome here." We never have to put up with satanic interference or suggestions (temptations), because, he is a defeated foe. Some people do put up with Satan, partly due to ignorance and sometimes because they find him entertaining. Satanic entertainment is as deadly as the venom of a viper.

Satan is seeking to draw us away from worship of the Lord God and since worshipping in music is desirable, Satan seeks to use music to incite lusts of the flesh. The more lusts become inflamed, the more susceptible we are to falling into sin. Satan uses the lusts of the eyes, ears, touch, taste and smell, in the seductive process with separation from the Lord God as his goal.

To those who are wise and overcome all that Satan is seeking to do against them, God gives his blessing of peace.

Chapter Thirty-one

Reasons to Praise

Psalm 30

A psalm. A song. For the dedication of the temple. Of David.

I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit.

Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.

To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: "What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help."

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

There are many reasons to praise the Lord. The list we could make would be very long if we have the understanding to see all that God has done for each of us. Sadly most people don't understand what constitutes divine mercy and love toward us.

In this Psalm, David begins by thanking God for a special healing he had received. He points out that there was a time in his life when he had apparently forgotten how sheltered a life he lived. He had become arrogant to the extent that he boasted that he was secure and could not be shaken. In retrospect, he acknowledges that the Lord had blessed him and that it was the Lord who had made his mountain (Jerusalem) firm. The arrogance of his heart had resulted in a disciplinary action on God's part. God hid his face from him causing dismay in the heart of David. Whether this resulted in a physical illness, or whether it resulted in deep travail and anguish of heart, I don't know, but in any case David sought the Lord in special earnestness sensing death was eminent unless God healed him.

Whether the healing was restoration of fellowship and shelter, or the removal of a physical ailment, in either case, it required an action of God. David reasoned that if God didn't heal him and he died, what good would that be, since those who lie in death can't praise the Lord. This is not a case for "soul sleep", as some believe, but rather a case for not taking people from this world prematurely if they are given to acknowledging the Lord.

When people died in the Old Testament, the focus was upon what happened to the physical body, not what happened to the soul. Apparently, not much thought had been given to the subject of what happens when a person dies, but by the time Jesus lived it was a hot issue. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were locked in a dead heat argument over the subject of the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, but the Pharisees did.

In a book authored by Josephus a Jewish historian who lived in the time period of Jesus' life, a story appears about a rich man and a beggar. The story is strikingly similar to the story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus. It is my belief that Jesus was giving verification of the correctness of the idea that the dead were not in the grave sleeping, as some believe, but rather in a location referred to as Abraham's bosom.

When Jesus came to a girl who had died and said that she was sleeping, it was again to counter the thought that dead meant dead. The weeping and wailing was a sign of hopeless grief, but Jesus wanted them to know that death, even in the physical sense, was a temporary condition much like falling asleep at night only to awake in the morning.

David was a man committed to praising the Lord and he acknowledged his arrogance and sought the healing of the Lord. This brings us to an interesting observation concerning the relationship David had with the Lord. He, like Christians today, lived with the benefit of a divine covering. This covering involves provisions, protection and the ongoing presence of the Lord. What happened to David was that due to a condition of heart, he had lost favor with God resulting in God hiding his face from him. This didn't mean that God had removed his candlestick, as it were, but rather some of the benefits of living in fellowship with God.

We live in a world under the curse that resulted from Adam and Eve sinning in the Garden of Eden. The result of that curse is that we have to struggle against conditions in this life that often make life miserable. All natural disasters, diseases and every kind of discomfort we struggle with are parts of the result of the curse. Christians, like David, have the privilege of living within a sort of bubble of divine protection. This doesn't mean that there are no discomforts in this bubble of protection, there definitely are. We struggle against many discomforts such as, having to make a living, pain in childbirth, weeds and pests of all sorts. We may be protected from death when a tornado hits, only to have lost all earthly goods. Or we may even be protected from both death and lose of goods, but suffer from losing a loved one. Sorrow, pain, and anguish from struggle are a part of the scheme of things in this world. God always leaves enough struggles, even for Christians who walk in his favor, to result in an increase of spiritual virtues.

David lost some of this covering and the result was there was a need for healing. To conclude that the reason for sickness was sin in his life is to also assume he was speaking of a physical sickness that he thought he would die from. David had a sickness of spirit as evidenced in his confession that called for a disciplinary action on God's part. It is my contention that anytime a person displeases the Lord and he lifts his hand of protection, things can then happen that otherwise might not have happened. God doesn't have to remove all protection to effect a disciplinary action.

I did something one day that was somewhat dishonest. It involved money and my desire to be a little more frugal than necessary. I sheltered the truth with a part truth, but God was displeased. I didn't realize that I had offended the Lord until during the night I had an episode with a physical problem that I hadn't had in quite awhile. It was somewhat severe, but not to the point of having to call for help. Though I wasn't overly anxious about what could have been serious, it did cause me to remember what had happened the day before. Like David, I confessed my wrong doing to the Lord and those close to me. I suffered the effects for most of the day

following, but the Lord returned his covering and I have been fine since. It was a reminder that the condition was still there, but that God was holding it in suspension. I now am aware that displeasing the Lord resulting in the removal of his hand is never a good thing to have happen.

I am sure that I am oblivious to many of the protections that have been upon my life. Even though I know they are there, my Father God only knows the extent of that protection. For the sake of my readers I won't enumerate the ones I am aware of, but I can assure you the list is long.

David wrote, "Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." (Psalms 30:5) And then, "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever." (Psalms 30:11-12) The humility of heart had returned, God had healed the King.

Chapter Thirty-two

A Word of Encouragement

Psalm 31

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.

I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD. I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.

Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my friends—those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. For I hear the slander of many; there is terror on every side; they conspire against me and plot to take my life.

But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love. Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave. Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you. In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues. Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city. In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.

Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

We all need a word of encouragement from time to time, and the words of a godly elder who has been down life's road ahead of us, encourages us. The experiences of those who have learned to trust the unfailing love of God are always full of instruction.

David's life had been full of conflicts. He had neighboring countries that were enemies and enemies within his own country. In the days of King David, the boundaries of nations were subject to the strength of the nation. Borders were loosely defined and had to be defended. David had expanded the national boundaries to include more of the area promised to Abraham and his descendants, but those who were displaced weren't happy about his claim to their land.

It is not at all uncommon for even loved and respected leaders to have enemies. Within any nation there are individuals who have different ideas about how things should be done. Some people may have resented David's conquests because; it meant young lives being lost. This fact could have gone somewhat unnoticed by those who rejoiced in victories, but to the mothers and fathers of those who died, it could have seemed rather unnecessary.

Politicians make decisions for a variety of reasons, and to some they are heroes, but if it results in the loss of the life of a loved one or property that has been someone's home perhaps for many years, it can be devastating.

David's interests were for his own nation, and those around him had to make room for his expansions. This of course caused resentment and anger that resulted in constant threats upon his life. David had to live with danger and criticism from those who thought he was too aggressive or wanted to get revenge for a lost loved one and others wanted to capture his throne.

Many of David's prayers reflect the anguish he felt. Sometimes when he would be walking down a street, people would run and hide from him, causing anguish to this man of love. David had a very sensitive side to his nature and was a caring man. He loved the people of God, and would have given his life for them. He was a musician and poet as well as a prophet, and sought to please the Lord in all his ways. This wasn't understood or appreciated by all who were his subjects, resulting in plots against him.

In this Psalm he recalls being caught in a city under siege and yet was obviously delivered. It seems that he thought he had come to his end and that God wasn't hearing him when he prayed. Sometimes it's that way in life; circumstances are like storm clouds that hide the sunlight from coming through to us. We may not feel like the sun is even there anymore, especially if we haven't seen it in awhile. I live in the San Joaquin Valley and sometimes in December fog will form in the valley and hang here for days, sometimes weeks. One year I worked in the foothills and would drive to the location of my work and find the sun was shining beautifully. Those living in the valley hadn't seen the sun for some time, but it was still there!

When we are under the pressure of immediate problems, we may feel overwhelmed and think there is no answer, surely this is the end, but our extremity is God's opportunity and how great it is to see him deliver us from all our troubles. There is a hiding place near to the heart of God, and for those who learn to go there, there is shelter from the fury of the storms of life. The storms will pass and spring will come. With spring come new opportunities and life goes on. It is in the storms we learn to love our God, and we see him in ways we never knew before.

David concludes his Psalm with these words, "Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD." (Psalms 31:23-24)

Chapter Thirty-three

God's Heavy Dealings

Psalm 32

Of David. *A maskil.*

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Selah* Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

There are special times when God calls to people to come to him. God is always calling to lost souls in the general sense of the word, but there are special times when he calls specifically and personally to individual people to come to him. Think on it, God creator of heaven and earth calling specifically to a person to come to him. How awesome that God would give us that kind of attention, but wait what about our sinfulness? David felt the weight of God's hand heavy upon him and whatever sins he had committed were brought heavily upon his mind. Conviction of sins is the first response to God when he comes to us.

Sometimes when we are going through our daily activities, we are not as aware of God's presence as we are in special moments of contemplation. There are times when it seems God is nowhere around and then temptations appear either in our minds or in our environment. Sins are like ruts in the road or potholes that we are able to avoid if we are consciously dealing with them, but if we become careless, we will inevitably wind up in them.

Real life begins when we come to the realization that God has anticipated whatever faults and failings we have. Lovingly, he has provided a redemptive plan that is already in place waiting for the moment when we finally realize our need for it to be applied to our hearts. David proclaimed in the voice of the prophet, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." (Psalms 32:1-2)

Coming to the realization of our need of a Savior is a major juncture in our lives. David said, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalms 32:3-5) It isn't easy to bring a person to the point of repentance. We are so clever at justifying ourselves, that even when we sin we still believe it is okay for this reason or that. To admit that we just blatantly sinned is most difficult. In David's case it took the heavy hand of God upon him until his strength was sapped, then he acknowledged the Lord.

Life is a moving thing, never waiting for us to make up our minds. It is a common occurrence that people go day after day doing what they must and then one day the realization hits them, life happened when they weren't looking!

I guess I speak from experience, I am approaching the latter days of my life, but how did I get here? Where have the years gone? When I was young it seemed that time was dragging, and anticipated moments would never become realities, then all a once I realized how fast life has slipped into history and now what?

When teenagers think about life it seems like they are looking into eternity, life to them seems endless. Why hurry? Why think seriously? Then come the years of marriage and family with all the demands that go with it. It's so easy to get caught up in the routines and demands of life that we forget the most important part, our walk with God.

Fortunate are the people who feel the hand of God upon them during all these phases of life. It takes the Holy Spirit to keep us focused upon the Lord. Even with the Holy Spirit heavily upon us, life still happens. How we respond is of eternal importance. David counsels us, "Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." (Psalms 32:6-7)

God is gathering a special group of people together shaping their character and commitment to his will for eternal purposes. The Psalmist declared, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him." (Psalms 32:8-10) Everyone has an equal opportunity to be worked upon by the Lord, but it is up to us to decide to what extent we will yield to his will.

There are some individuals who are called to a life of service in a very visible role and the dealings of God surround those activities. There are also individuals who are called to be people of God and the will of God is not so much what they do as to who they are and become in God. Doing or not doing is not what makes a person great in the eternal kingdom of God, but rather what is going on in the heart of the individual while they are doing whatever it is they do. The psalmist tells us, "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" (Psalms 32:11)

The most prominent figures in the Christian world, I am convinced, will not be assigned their place in heaven based on their faithfulness to their calling so much as to their individual walk with the Lord. It is no easier to stay in tune with the Lord in one calling than in another. Those in full time ministry are just as prone to neglecting the Lord in their personal life as the person who is plowing a field. It's not the amount of time one has to spend in concentrated prayer that makes one close to the Lord, but rather, a heart that serves him faithfully. You can spend all your waking moments involved in ministry to others, and still not have a personal relationship with the Lord. I'm not speaking here about salvation, only the richness of our walk with Christ.

Chapter Thirty-four

Trust In the Lord

Psalm 33

Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.

For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance. From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth — he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

God is worthy of praise, declares the teacher. Praise him in singing, in playing instruments, with new songs, and with shouts of joy. We have reason to be full of joy, because God is our Lord!

When God and man come into relationship, amazing things begin to happen. God delights in watching righteous men live righteous lives. I am convinced that God enjoys seeing people being who he created them to be.

When the nation of Israel came together for feast days, they came to enjoy seeing one another and worshipping the Lord together. In my mind's eye, I see them as a happy people.

During the days between feasts, they had to plant their crops, care for their animals, and do all the chores common to life in those days. Life was simpler in some ways, but more difficult in others. The way they prepared food was different. Remember there were no refrigerators, stoves, ovens, microwaves, dishwashers, food processors, canneries or supermarkets. If you wanted lamb for supper you had to kill one, prepare a fire and roast it. If you wanted bread you had to grind the grain and bake it.

When I was in India, part of the time we were in Rajasthan State in north India and we visited some villages where life was very similar to life in Israel during the days when the Bible was being written. Most of the food was cooked over open fires. The more modern method was a fireplace, though one family I stayed with had a microwave.

The way we live our lives today was totally unknown to the people of Israel then. Life was difficult but good. There was a sense of community and families were close to one another and depended upon one another. During the reign of King David the nation was enjoying prosperity and safety, therefore, David as teacher, reminded them frequently of their dependency upon the Lord.

In our lives today we have many wonderful conveniences and more are being made available every day. The world that was once well divided by languages and geographical conditions such as mountain ranges, rivers, and oceans, are now joined together by such devices as modern means of travel, internet communications, and educational institutions that have made even language an insignificant barrier. The term "world traveler" that denoted a person of means and status, has lost its symbolism as even some of the poorest among us have traveled extensively. The world population that was scattered at the tower of Babel is now being reunited at the computer screen. Nations that were enemies a short time ago are now cooperating in technological advances. One has to wonder, what will this new tower of Babel that is forming look like? Is it a series of space stations or a colony on Mars? Will God once again look down upon man and ask, "What are they doing?"

With all these advances have come new challenges to the spirit of man. Evil men have found new opportunities to exploit the weakness of other individuals. Destructive individuals too have found opportunities to cause havoc like never before. Lawmakers are scrambling to make new

laws to contain the evil desires of those bent on evil. The idea that laws will solve our problems is the new hope of many in society. Others point out that it isn't the creations of new laws but rather the enforcement of the existing laws that is needed.

If there ever was a time when people need to remember the tried and tested paths of the past, it is today. The more things change, the more they stay the same! Satan is still the tempter, and sin in hearts of humans is still the same problem that it was when Cain killed his brother Able. We may find the cure for cancer, and a host of other ailments, and see life expectancy rise to spans equal to men of old, but there is only one cure for a sinful heart. It was given to us when Jesus gave his life a ransom for all. Sin is still the evidence of hearts that are not sufficiently in fellowship with God. Fellowship with God is the result of the redemptive work of Jesus when he gave his life as a sin offering for humanity.

Society seeks to live under law because evil is in the hearts of many. The most that law can do for any society is to contain the evil, but it never cures it. It takes an experience with God who is the giver of eternal life to change the heart of man. The spirit of eternal life is not only meant for us after we die but also now while we live in this world. The power of the Spirit is a life altering power that transforms what was written in the law God gave Moses into heart-felt desires. Previously these were restraints, now they are desires. Desires to do what is pleasing to the Lord are a result of the impartation of the Holy Spirit into our lives. When Christians continue to have desires that are contrary to the holiness of God and the commands given in the word, they are either under attack by Satan or are experiencing symptoms of a lack of spiritual life. Sometimes this lack is the result of spiritual exercises that have become rituals instead of a means of worshipping God. When we stay in close fellowship with the Lord, we receive evidences of his spirit in our spirit manifesting in purity of heart, mind and body. "The word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love." (Psalms 33:4)

Is God capable of keeping us from evil? The Psalmist answers this question by saying, "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." (Psalms 33:5-11)

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD." (Psalms 33:12) I heard someone call into a talk show on the radio the other day discussing what it is that has made the United States such a great nation. The discussion was about such things as freedom, laws and such matters, but not about the fact that this nation was founded upon the principles of faith in God. As a nation God was honored as our God and specifically our faith in Jesus Christ. This fact of our faith in Jesus Christ has been watered down because we have a strong Jewish community among us who reject Jesus but embrace the God of the Bible, as they understand him. We also now have many other concepts of God that some say are all directed toward the same eternal being, God. Be that as it may, the fact remains; we are a nation that still has some notion of trust in God, though outwardly we trust more in ourselves than God. Honoring God nationally doesn't save anyone; it still remains that there is no other way to the Father except through Jesus Christ, but national recognition of God does usually permit evangelization. It is my contention that it is because, at least in the beginning, we made the LORD our God and therefore we are blessed.

Every nation that becomes great and develops a strong military presence faces the temptation to trust in that military power to keep them safe. David had developed military strength in the nation of Israel but he kept his faith in the Lord. Do we need a strong military force to keep us safe? I contend that we do, however not as an object of faith. Build a strong military, but trust in the Lord. The principle is that we always are to do what we know to do, but never trust in what we know to do. We trust in God because he is always supreme in every way. If you suddenly

come into great wealth, invest wisely, enjoy the benefits, but never trust in wealth and never become hard to the needy of the world.

The idea that we should go around feeling guilty because we are blessed is error in the highest order. We are not to feel guilty; we are to rejoice in the Lord seeing blessings as a part of grace and praise his holy name! Sing and make melody in your hearts, and if you have money to give to a needy person or cause, give it as a part of your worship to the Lord. Never give out of guilt or obligation, but rather out of love.

I teach the people in my church to give as a part of their worship and I tell them that if they give what the Lord wants them to give, it is enough. I don't covet their money nor does God! When God asks us to give it is so that our faith and obedience will release his hand in blessing. Those who seek to make people feel guilty and thus get them to give are robbing people of their joy and blessing that comes from giving worshipfully and joyfully to the Lord.

God's blessings come to us as demonstrations of his love and grace. Because God is gracious we can say with the Psalmist, "We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you."(Psalms 33:20-22)

Chapter Thirty-five

Taste and See that the Lord is Good

Psalm 34

Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

¹¹ Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

¹⁹ A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

²¹ Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

The place occupied by those who fear the Lord is truly a blessed place. The Psalmist had discovered this place and wants to share it with all that will listen. He observed that those who fear the Lord have a radiance about them that we know to be the presence of the Lord. We have

good reason to exalt the Lord, because living in the presence of the Lord brings peace, love and joy to us measurelessly. Living for the Lord is not a philosophical condition, it is a true-life experience. David learned the true meaning of the benefit of living at peace with God; therefore he called for praise to be on the lips of those listening to him as he extolled the Lord with words of praise.

Why not praise the Lord? Even in the darkest hours of human experience, the Lord is always there with those who fear him and serve him. In the end, he delivers from all torments, pains, and sorrows. The wicked fall never to rise again, but the righteous go to be with the Lord forever. What a privilege it is to serve the Lord because while we are in this life we have his presence with us always, meaning that his guidance, instructions, provisions and loving care always result in a fulfilling life. It is a fact of life on earth that suffering will come even to the righteous, but with the presence of the Lord, suffering only enriches our love because his comfort and power are always there for us.

David needed the Lord to deliver him, and therefore, he called upon the Lord, and the Lord delivered him. The occasion of the deliverance that was the catalyst to this Psalm is said to be when David acted like a crazy man before Abimelech. Who Abimelech was, is a point of speculation, however it is commonly believed that it was Achish the Philistine king of Gath. Though it is not clear why the difference of name, yet the story line makes it seem plausible that one or the other was either a title or a family name. It is also possible that it was a different incident and that only the method David used to escape was the same. In either case, David gave the glory to the Lord seeing it as an act of divine intervention. In this Psalm David refers to himself as a poor man who was surrounded by the camp of an angel.

He experienced fear, but the Lord delivered him from it. In the natural David had every reason to be fearful. He was often in hostile territory and at the same time was being hunted by King Saul. When he went to sleep at night, he had to trust the Lord. He had to constantly be on the alert against enemies of all sorts. He never knew when there might even be an uprising among his own men because many of them were outlaws before they met David. David never trusted in man, though he seemed to be loved by those who served him. He had learned to trust in the Lord and found him to be an adequate source of strength and comfort.

When David wrote in Psalms 23 that the Lord prepared a table before him in the presence of his enemies, he knew whereof he spoke. Here in this Psalm he invites his listeners to taste and see that the Lord is good. The words of the song I used to sing as a young man come to mind, "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good, oh it tastes like honey in the rock." It is a spiritual privilege to sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, feasting upon the hidden manna, while being surrounded by crushing circumstances. Having peace is a supernatural event when everything about us cries out against it. How can we live in peace when our spouse is doing sinful things, our children are rebellious, our job is in jeopardy, when our loved one is sick, and bill collectors are hounding us because we don't have sufficient funds to pay them? We're not supposed to have peace according to the world, but all things are possible to him who believes. It is faith that releases the enabling power of God to sustain us in our darkest hour.

David was able to say, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalms 23:4) There is a special hiding place in the care of the Lord, and for those who put their total trust in him, he is able to deliver from any and all difficulties.

Suffering is a part of this life experience, as we learn from Romans 5:2-5 "And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

At this juncture in Psalms 34, David pauses to instruct his listeners. He wants them to understand the importance of fearing the Lord. The fear of the Lord is fading fast from the

Christian vernacular. The overstressing of the message of grace has caused many to abandon the fear of the Lord. Whereas it is true that Jesus is seen to be our elder brother, friend and confidant, he is still Almighty God!

It is a part of the message of Grace that we can now boldly enter the court of heaven and fearlessly approach the throne of God, but still in all of this we dare not lose the fear of the Lord! I fear the Lord, not because I am afraid of him, but rather, because I know who he is, and that he is able to destroy me if he wished to do so! We are warned about being presumptuous in our conduct and that even though when sin abounds his grace much more abounds, we are not given permission to go on sinning. The purposes of God aren't served by our sinfulness, but rather by how much sin we are able to overcome through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. We who have been born again live lives that are produced by the Lord Jesus in us. It is he, who is the source of any righteous conduct that becomes visible in our lives. We can't produce righteousness, but we can embrace righteousness and seek him who is our righteousness. As we embrace his character, the world sees character in us. They may think it is our character they see but we know it comes from the Lord in us.

It is in the spirit of what we are dwelling upon that the words of David come into view, "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." (Psalms 34:12-14)

The Psalmist goes on, "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth."

"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (Psalms 34:15-18)

Peter also verifies the fact that our prayers can be hindered by sinful conduct.

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'" (Romans 5:7-12)

There is a messianic theme in many of the Psalms and this is no exception. Wherever we see the principles of righteousness and the intervention of God being expounded, we also see the shadow of the cross and applicable phrases to the life of Jesus. When David spoke of the preservation of the bones from being broken, it follows that this promise must find fulfillment in the hour of crucifixion because, the Lord was righteous, and therefore, the promise was applicable. It was customary that the guards would break the legs of victims of crucifixion to speed the death process in the late hours of the day, but when they came to Jesus, he was already dead having given up his spirit to God, thus his bones were not broken. (See John 19:30-35)

This is one of the many instances where we find little gems of insight into the sufferings of Christ for us. In his lifetime, Jesus experienced all the sufferings common to the righteous along with the interventions of God, but when it came to his redemptive role, he also experienced all that judgment prescribed for the guilty before God, thus becoming the sin sacrifice for the world. He was judged guilty even though he was not guilty himself, his guilt was our guilt, and his sin was our sin as he took our place on the cross.

As David concludes the Psalm it is with a promise of redemption by the LORD, indicating that the one who would provide salvation was none other than the LORD. Jesus was the LORD in fleshly form so that he could be our Savior. When the word LORD is presented in all capital

letters, it indicates the holy name of God known as the Tetragrammaton, and is the word used by David in this Psalm as being the provider of redemption for those who take refuge in him. Thus, another piece of the foundational truths was put into place in the scriptures concerning the divine role and person of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Thirty-six

False Brothers

Psalm 35

Of David.

Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away; may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them. Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, may ruin overtake them by surprise—may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin. Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation. My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them."

Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about. They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn. Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; attackers gathered against me when I was unaware. They slandered me without ceasing. Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me. O Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue my life from their ravages, my precious life from these lions. I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you.

Let not those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; let not those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land. They gape at me and say, "Aha! Aha! With our own eyes we have seen it." O LORD, you have seen this; be not silent. Do not be far from me, O Lord. Awake, and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord. Vindicate me in your righteousness, O LORD my God; do not let them gloat over me. Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!" or say, "We have swallowed him up." May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace. May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, "The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant." My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long.

No one enjoys being a spectacle, especially when the embarrassment we experienced was maliciously planned and carried out. Only evil enemies do such things. David was evidently the victim of such attacks and it produced agony of spirit to him.

I remember when I was in school as a child and one of my teachers liked to shame students who didn't do well on some lesson. I had missed some classes and as a result was having difficulty with my math lesson. She called me to the front of the class and had me face the class while she explained what a failure I was. I felt deeply humiliated and hated going to school that year.

Jesus too, was the bunt of many false accusations. For example, “But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.’” (Matt. 12:24) Those were cutting words but Jesus used them as a catalyst to give us the teaching concerning the unity of a kingdom. The Scribes and Pharisees were constantly on the watch for an opportunity to discredit the Lord Jesus, but even in the court of the high priest as they sought grounds to have him put to death, Jesus had to come to their aid and provide the grounds by claiming his position with the Father!

The stress of having every word scrutinized is a burden borne by those in the public eye, but it is especially painful when it is not your words or deeds that are causing you grief but rather misrepresentations based on lies.

David knew where to turn for help; he turned to the Lord. Subtle enemies are hard to fight. They can appear to be your friend, but at a crucial moment can either make a false statement, or fail to tell the truth they know to be accurate. Sometimes it is just a look on the face, or a shrug of the shoulders, but the result is a negative message that can turn the heart of the observer in a totally wrong direction. When your enemies appear to be your friends, it is especially painful. Case in point, Judas Iscariot coming into the garden where Jesus was praying and betraying him with a kiss, a step beyond what had been predicted even by prophets! Jesus knew he was going to betray him but expressed surprise at the method!

Have you ever been surprised by the method people use to discredit you? When it is to someone’s advantage, it is not uncommon to exaggerate when making accusations. For example, when Judas betrayed Jesus he didn’t need to kiss him, just point him out was all that was needed. Sin carried him beyond where repentance could find him, and all that was left was destruction. Those who harbor sin in their hearts find expressions of that sin coming out in many ways, sometimes subtly, but always hurtfully.

David sought retribution against his enemies, desiring that they become the victims of their own plots. He appealed to the salvation that God alone can justly give because if David did it, it would be vengeance. David always sought to keep himself free from vengeance, but made his appeals to God.

The one time that David took matters into his own hands after his adulterous tryst with Bathsheba; he paid for it dearly when their son took sick and died. Sin is an ugly blight on anyone’s life, but especially upon the life of those called to be ministers of the words of God.

There is no greater pain born by those who minister to others than to have the very ones you have been so concerned for and have sought the Lord for, turn on you and gloat over you when difficulty comes your way. Like David expressed in this Psalm, many ministers have poured out their lives in service to congregations, seeking the Lord in behalf of the people and sometimes praying and fasting for them. Then later those very people rise up against the pastor and seek his resignation. Why did God not answer David when he prayed for these people, even though he had fasted and prayed for them when they were sick? Was it because God saw their disloyal hearts, and the wickedness that was lurking there? (See Psalms 35:11-16)

Often in churches where God is withholding some benefit of his redemptive work, the reason is more with the people than with the pastor. God sees the motives of the hearts of people when they gather in church for services. Some come to be seen by others, some it is to seek a blessing from the Lord, while others do it for political advantage. It seems to me that God is looking for people who are committed to seeking to know him personally, and to love one another unconditionally. When people come into the presence of the Lord to worship him, and to seek his face and their needs and wants are incidental to the occasion, God is pleased. Those who seek the Lord with their whole hearts find him receptive to their prayers. However, many ministers have been wounded in their faith because they have been seeking the Lord for the needs of people whose hearts have been untrue and disloyal. Whenever we pray and our prayers go unanswered, wounds to our faith occur even though we may accept the rejection mentally as okay, we still suffer.

When the righteous desires vindication, they desire the Lord to be exalted. The righteousness of the righteous comes from the Lord and when we are vindicated he is vindicated. The Lord delights in blessing the righteous and it is vindication from him when it occurs.

Chapter Thirty-seven

About Willful Ignorance and Self Deception

Psalm 36

For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD.

An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.

Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart. May the foot of the proud not come against me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. See how the evildoers lie fallen—thrown down, not able to rise!

“The end justifies the means,” they say, as wicked men continue to do violent acts. So what if the reputation of a righteous man suffers in the process? So what if innocents are killed in the womb of a wanton mother? “We have rights, you know,” they say. And they flatter themselves speaking of their tolerance for those whose lifestyle is out of the norm. Tolerance is good if it is tolerance of the nationality, the economic state, or some other condition that the person has had trust upon him without his control or consent. Tolerance of sin is not a condition to gloat over, however, when it is sin and the sin is the result of choices made.

David was amazed as we are, when we see sinners sinning and bragging about their sins as if they don't matter. In our time some speak of victimless crimes or sins, as if some sins don't have victims and therefore are acceptable. The logic of such an idea doesn't stand up to real and honest thought, however. Even if the victim is one's self, is it in some way of less concern? There is a sense in which what concerns one, concerns all, because sin has consequences. Let's take the subject of consensual sex that is so popular today. If two people agree and no disease is transmitted, no pregnancy occurs, is it therefore victimless? Perhaps, if you ignore God in the matter, if you fail to see that sin sears the conscience of the offender, and therefore opens the door to other violations that do affect others. Once we justify one form of sin, we are forced to apply the same logic to other forms of sins. Sin is not a multiple-choice matter giving us the option of which sins we will allow and which ones we will condemn. That is the game of fools. All sins separate both the individual who sins and those who condone the sins from the grace and love of God. Yes, God forgives sin, but the consequences of sin remain.

Did God forgive Adam and Eve for sinning in the garden? I am sure he did, but that didn't take the curse away! God even came in the form of man and paid the demands of justice for us, but that hasn't removed the curse yet. The curse remains and so do the sins of the unbelievers.

Those who accept the redemption offered by God are allowed to pursue eternal life, yet the struggle remains against the curse. No matter how great the spiritual development of an individual, pain, struggle and eventual death come to all. This is the result of the curse as is all the violence experienced on this planet. This is not the curse of the law, but rather the curse from the Garden of Eden where sin found its origin. We still must deal with the curse upon this planet and race while in this world. The curse of the law, as outlined in Deuteronomy 28, is no longer in force for a Christian who is dead to the law having identified with the death of Christ for him and is now alive unto the Lord. Though we live in a body of death, so to speak, we now live after the Spirit and thus are free from the passions of the sinful nature.

We are only here for a brief time in which we are allowed to make choices regarding eternal matters—after that comes death and the judgment. No amount of achievements or service to humankind affects that outcome. Service to humanity and good deeds only have eternal value when performed in the light and for the benefit of the eternal kingdom of God. It doesn't take much to qualify a deed as having eternal value, only that it is an expression of faith in God. Jesus said that even a cup of water given in the name of a prophet wouldn't lose its reward.

After David finished expressing his amazement, he began to extol the great love of God. "Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies." There is a saying, "Flattery will get you everywhere." That is especially true when the flattery is true, and what David was saying about the love of God was not only true, but also a gross understatement. When he spoke of the love of God as being priceless he was getting closer to the truth.

How different were the words of David than the words of the Israelites who came out of Egypt when they murmured and complained. While the Israelites were in the desert, they failed to understand the love of God, and therefore, all they were concerned with was their own comforts and needs. When God met their needs they apparently thought that it was what they deserved and that God had come through on his obligation to them.

As long as we think we deserve the goodness of God, we will never be truly thankful. There are some people who have been taught that God must keep his word, and that they have a right to be heard when they pray. When we understand the righteousness of God and how good he is, we are filled with wonder that he cares about us at all. Unthankful people are small-minded people. Small minded I say, because if they understood the reality, they would understand that their behaviors have long ago canceled all divine obligation toward them. God not only is not obligated to hear us when we pray, but would have been justified in destroying us the very first time we disobeyed him! From there onward, it is by grace that we are saved. And it is by grace that he responds to our prayers.

Yes, there are powerful promises in the word of God, but those who seek legal grounds for an appeal to God are still in bitterness and iniquity. Some have been lead astray by the miss-punctuated verse of scripture in the King James Version Bible, where it says to command God. To show the misconception I quote from both the KJV and the NIV. Note the part in bold as the words and punctuation in question.

⁹Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! *Let* the potsherd *strive* with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto *his* father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?

¹¹Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, **command ye me**. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, *even* my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. (Is. 45:9-12 KJV)

Note that the phrase "command ye me" ends with a period that some have misconstrued to be an invitation to command God. When the entire passage is read, however, it is clear that God is

rebuking their arrogance and the very idea that man could question or command God. When we read the same passage in the NIV we see that the rendering is consistent in the entire passage and thus correctly ends the phrase with a question mark.

⁹ “Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘He has no hands?’ Woe to him who says to his father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to his mother, ‘What have you brought to birth?’

¹¹ “This is what the LORD says— the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, **or give me orders about the work of my hands?** It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.

Some people arrogantly approach God, not understanding the great love and compassion of God and his willingness to overlook our infirmity and insufficient mental ability to grasp such great wonders. God is gracious and kind and even though we do very inappropriate things at times sees our faith and overlooks our sins. It is by grace that God sees us as we would look upon our own little children and when we see errors in their behavior, we seek to bring correction in an appropriate way.

God desires that we come to a place in him where we can appreciate his love and care and trust in him to always act in our best interests. We don’t have to twist God’s arm, so to speak, to get him to act, but he wants to be able to supply our needs from love and not because we have demanded it! David was never a timid man when facing enemies, but when he came before God, he recognized the truth that God was his friend and not his enemy! David didn’t use the weapons of warfare against God, nor should we! Jesus said,

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:25-33)

David understood the constant care of the Lord with reference to this planet, and how righteously he cares for it. He said, “Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love!” (Psalms 36:6-7) We, as people of God, are so blessed to have Almighty God as our constant caregiver! Whether we are high or low, it doesn’t matter, if we put our trust in him, he takes care of his own. The Psalmist observed the love and care of God on every hand toward the righteous, but how God also brought the ungodly to eventual justice. He didn’t want to ever succumb to the temptation to retaliate against those who are evil, and thus to become evil himself.

Living free of self-deception, or any other form of evil, is a constant struggle because Satan wants to deceive even the elect if that is possible. It is possible for Satan to deceive the righteous, however, if they are not vigilant. There are many fine and wonderful Christians who have succumbed to some form of deception due to carnal desires that opened the door of their minds to the voice of the deceiver. Wise Christians pray for the Lord to be vigilant concerning the condition of their minds and to keep them from deceiving spirits.

Chapter Thirty-eight

Do Not Fret

Psalm 37

Of David.

Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.

Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. **Delight yourself in the LORD** and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; **do not fret**—it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.

The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.

The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright. But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken.

Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.

The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure forever. In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.

But the wicked will perish: The LORD's enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish—vanish like smoke.

The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously; those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off.

If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand. I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed.

Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever. For **the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones**. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off; the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.

The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just. The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip. The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, seeking their very lives; but **the LORD will not leave them in their power or let them be condemned when brought to trial**.

Wait for the LORD and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found.

Consider the blameless, observe the upright; there is a future for the man of peace. But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off.

The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.

“Do not fret” the Psalmist admonishes three times in this psalm; first because of evil men. It is frustrating to see people doing wicked things and seemingly getting away with it; that is the way it is in this world. I suppose if we knew all the wicked things being done and those who seem to be getting away with it, it would be a burden too great to bear. Nevertheless, we are admonished not to fret! Is that because our desire for justice is wrong? Is it because sin doesn't

really matter after all? Justice deferred is still justice, and God has a way of getting around to judgment. God allows a little time to the wicked while he deals with them tenderly wooing them to repent so that they can take their rightful place in his blessings. The suffering of those who persist in rebellion, however, will be even greater when they realize how the grace of God was offered to them.

So do not fret, it only leads to evil; but rather, trust in the Lord, delight yourself in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Pay no attention to the prosperity of the wicked because all too soon they will pass away, but the righteous will live forever!

In family life, when a child is sick or in deep trouble, the parents become occupied with the need of that child. Often the other siblings go seemingly unnoticed while they go on doing what is right and faithfully performing their assigned duties. They understand this and even seek to help the needy sibling even though there may have been a lot of sibling strife before the occasion. If however, the problem is prolonged, and the attentions given to the needy child continues, fretting begins to set in. This scenario is also played out in the family of God.

There are some individuals who God seems to pay special attention to, always answering every prayer, granting every desire of their hearts, and even giving them what they only thought they might want. Others seem to be ignored by God. Their way is difficult and hardships seem to stalk them relentlessly. Does God favor one above another? If appearances mean anything, then yes, but not so fast, God is eternal. He knows what each of us needs and each person is being groomed for some part in his eternal plan. What works in one person's life and relationship to the Lord, would be like poison to others! In some God is developing a form of character that requires hardships and endurance, while others are being groomed for very different purposes. If you are the one going through the hard places and next to you is a person who is being blessed in what may even seem to be an obscene way, don't fret, the end is not yet. We're just getting started on this eternal journey with the Lord. God is busy getting us all into right formation. The master knows what is ahead in every person's future glory and he has to prepare us for it. This life is not heaven; this is preparation time.

When Solomon built the temple of God in Jerusalem, the workmen went into the quarry and selected stones for the construction. Each stone was hewn to very exacting detail so that when it was brought to the temple site and put into its place it would fit perfectly. There was not even the sound of a hammer or chisel heard at the temple site. This required great skill and attention to detail by the workmen. They also went into the forest and selected trees to be hewn to become parts of the temple that were made of wood. Wood and stone are different in strength and character. Stones required polishing, while wood would be overlaid with gold. Some of the wood became furniture, while stone was the superstructure of the temple. Are you being shaped for a part in the eternal temple of God? Are you stone or wood or maybe gold or silver? Perhaps you are even fabric that beautiful embroidery work is being performed upon. Maybe you are the embroidery itself! Each part is necessary to the total beauty and function of the temple. You are a special creative work of God and he knows what he is doing. Life is the quarry, the sawmill, the weaver's room, and the place where the fine art of engraving is being performed.

We don't know all that God is doing or what it takes in each person's life to accomplish his purposes. Some people have a lot of excess material or earthiness that has to be removed. It's useless material in the eternal scheme of things. It's like the bark and outer portions of a log being hewn to specifications for use in a structure. These are excessive material that has accumulated that is interfering with the finished product desired. Our master craftsman is at work and the clay doesn't ask the potter, "What are you forming?" Nor does the log ask, "Why are you cutting me so?" Even diamonds have to undergo cutting and polishing. There is a part of us that the master wants; the rest is useless for eternal purposes and will stay at the quarry. Life is the quarry; heaven is home. In the quarry there may be test placements, and then further chiseling done. In the end when all is completed, the assignment is made and the master places each part in it's their eternal place.

Do not fret; God loves you! My, how he loves you! You may feel all alone now, but in the end you will see, whatever you have been called upon to endure has been for a divine purpose and it is more than worth the struggles.

“Trust in the LORD and do good—Delight yourself in the LORD—Commit your way to the LORD—Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him, these are the admonitions of the Psalmist.” We are such action-oriented people that the very idea of viewing our life as the work of the master creator is sometimes unbearable.

My wife came upon a fellow minister one day who began to open his heart concerning his ministry in a town near by. He told her about the attitude of the people in the church and how he found them unbearable. He had seen God do wonderful things in his ministry but nothing was happening in this church. He soon resigned and went on his way. Did he do wrong in leaving? I can't say, because I frankly don't know. Perhaps he was wrong in even going there, again I don't know, but it does serve the purpose of illustration of how hard it is to trust in the Lord and wait patiently for him! We can say wonderful sounding words about the sovereignty of the Lord, and how he is faithful and how we ought to trust in him, can we trust him when he says wait?

In my pastoral ministry I have witnessed a number of people who have made grand statements about how committed they were to our ministry, and then have left the church because they saw what seemed to them to be a better opportunity elsewhere. Were they wrong in their statements about commitment? God knows. I think it is easy for a person to confuse what God is saying to them as being the voice of the Lord to others. Its easy to get up and give a fine sounding admonition to others about how committed they need to be and then having said it, feel that they have done God's bidding, not considering that what was said could have been to themselves. If God is dealing in a person's life about faithfulness to duty, and persevering in hardships, leaving the situation will never stop God's dealings, but perhaps it will delay it.

In my opinion, if God is truly leading a person in their life and it is God's will that they go to a certain place, it is very important then to stay in that place of assignment until God is truly leading away from it. Going to a certain church, or a certain job or whatever it is that we are being assigned to may not be intended to be a “forever” assignment, but we should always be cautious about jumping about from one situation to another. Usually this is a sign of instability.

Do not fret when people of lesser talents and abilities or sinners are able to accomplish what you have tried to accomplish but to no avail. Sometimes God allows things to happen that seem very unjust to us at the time, but God knows what he is doing. The Psalmist brings us back to simplicity by reminding us that God never forsakes his own. They will never have to beg bread as a result of living for God. God will never forsake our families or us. God is faithful and can be trusted because he is a God of love.

Chapter Thirty-nine

God's Discipline is Real

Psalm 38

A psalm of David. A petition.

¹ O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.

⁹ All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away. Those who seek my life set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception.

I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth; I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply. I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God. For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips."

¹⁷ For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin. Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous. Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good.

²¹ O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior.

Is there a price to pay when we sin? David believed there was. When I was just a young teen living in Oregon, a young woman who had been raised in church and had given her heart to the Lord got married and had a child, but the child was born with all sorts of physical problems. The child subsequently died and I remember her stating that it was because she had become sexually active before marriage and the child was conceived out of wedlock. This made a profound impression on me and I realized that what the scripture says about sowing and reaping is true. No one can sow their wild oats without reaping a harvest of wild oats.

The way I understand this is that those who please the Lord live under a protective cover. When we leave the cover to sin, we also leave the protection from whatever dangers are involved with the sin. Many people have at times lived in a sinful condition and still experienced some degree of divine protection, but when that happens it is purely the grace of God. To willfully leave a life of dedicated obedience to the Lord and commit sins is very dangerous to say the least.

The subject of discipline is taken up in the book of Hebrews with these words,

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. (Hebrews 12:4-13)

David had an experience in his life when he became very ill. He believed it to be discipline and realized it was due to some sin he had committed. What the sin was is not disclosed, but David recognized his physical problem as judgment. Experiencing discipline for sin is one thing, but when it leaves you vulnerable to attack from your enemies, that creates an additional burden. Such was the case with David.

Some people feel that because we live in the age of grace that all that is required when we sin is to say we are sorry. Others seem to feel that once a sinner comes to the Lord and repents, that not only are all past sins forgiven but also all future sins. There is a sense in which that is true, since Jesus died once and all sin was thus paid for, past, present and future. Experientially,

however, keeping our hearts right before God is an ongoing necessity. Jesus warned his disciples and us through them, that it is vitally important to remain in the vine. Jesus was using the vine as a familiar illustration of a spiritual truth. He referred to himself as the vine and we the branches. As the branches receive the nutrients of life from the original vine, so we must receive our nutrients of spiritual life from him. Since sin is a violation against God, and sin separates us from that place of fellowship where we are receiving the nutrients of life; if we allow that fellowship to be broken through rebellion, we will also experience the withering effect spiritually.

It is important to understand that there is a difference between being forgiven our sins, and experiencing the result of sin. In this present world there are many conditions that threaten our very spiritual existence, just as there are natural threats to our natural lives. These conditions are the result of the fall of Adam and Eve and the subsequent curse. Sometimes it seems that everything is set against our very ability to survive. In this world our health is very fragile, and so are our resources. Sinful passions rage within the hearts of unregenerated people, and keeping the peace is a task that requires a strong government with well-conceived laws. If the restraints of law are sufficiently strong, then most people will stay within the boundaries of civilized behavior, but when the ability to enforce laws becomes weak, sin flourishes and so does violence. We see this truth when large crowds become agitated and police forces are inadequate, frequently violence breaks out. When that happens crimes of all sorts break out because people feel safe to do what they would not do under other circumstances. Those in authority are occupied with the big issues of restoring order, so those who are inclined to be law-breakers feel they are safe from arrest for crimes of looting or vandalism.

Many people look about and see that in the general population people are sinning without apparent consequences and thus conclude that it is okay to sin. This line of logic seems to also be flourishing among Christians who see their peers sinning without apparent consequences, so they sin too.

Those who have been born again live under somewhat different rules from the world at large. We are looking forward to a future life with God in his Kingdom. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and now are accountable to him. What others do is not our concern, only our own actions. We will have to give a personal account to the Lord Jesus who died for us. This is why correction is so important, so we will not continue to sin or go in a wrong direction of life. One of the major purposes of the work of the Holy Spirit in us is to prepare us for eternal purposes. Our work on earth, though important, is somewhat incidental to the big picture. This is only phase one of our eternal life. What we do as service to others and especially that that is done in the name of the Lord and for the proclamation of the gospel have a direct bearing upon what will be in the eternal sense.

Discipline can be very grievous, and for David it was, but his faith in God remained strong and his love for God was constant. It wasn't God's fault that he suffered, but he desired that discipline end soon. Not so much because he was hurting, but because those who were his enemies were seeking to take advantage of the situation. God's anger is but for a moment when compared to eternity, but for us, even that moment can seem like eternity. After the tears have been wiped away and repentance has produced its good work, eternal joy is the result.

Chapter Forty

What is the Number of Our Days?

Psalm 39

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

¹I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence." But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:

⁴"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. *Selah* Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

⁷"But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools. I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this. Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of your hand. You rebuke and discipline men for their sin; you consume their wealth like a moth—each man is but a breath. *Selah* "Hear my prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my keeping. For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were. Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more."

How quickly the years of life pass. When I was a youth I thought that old age was far from me, but then I got busy with child raising, working, and life seemed to gobble me up and one day I realized many years had passed and I was now older. "Life happens when you're not looking," became a saying of mine. I've been a pastor of my present church for a long enough period of time that some of the babies that I dedicated to the Lord are now dedicating their babies.

David asked the Lord, "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life."

My brother-in-law called us last night and we began to exchange stories of events of the past month. We told him how our motor home had caught on fire while traveling to Montana and how helpless we felt standing along side the road watching the fire rage in the engine compartment and expecting to see it burn to the ground. We were trying to get traffic to stop hoping someone could help us but to no immediate avail. My wife was panic-stricken and in desperation shouted "Lord help us," and suddenly the fire went out. We told him how the tow truck took us to the nearest town and left us by a repair garage for the night and helped us hook up to electrical power. The interior of the motor home was untouched due to the timely intervention of the Lord, so we stayed there that night. The next day we were advised to go on to our destination in a rental car and let the man at the garage repair the damage, so we took what we needed and went on in a little compact car. We were on our way to help our youngest son with his work but found that the Lord also had some more pressing matters in mind for us.

As I stood along side the road pondering what had happened and reflecting upon all the times that God had prevented similar things from happening, I realized that the Lord could have just as easily prevented this from happening but he didn't. He did, however, let it go far enough to demonstrate his power to intervene in a way that many people were able to see in a tangible way what we have been saying about the power of the Lord. I wondered, what did the Lord have in mind now? Surely something wonderful was about to happen. In Montana a teenage girl gave her heart to the Lord. Another was experiencing misunderstandings resulting in daily conflicts. I knew that the Lord had motivated us to go; therefore, I also knew that all would be well. Our insurance company took wonderful care of the situation, and financially we benefited.

That was our side of the conversation; then my brother-in-law began to tell us about how he had been in a major traffic accident about the same time. His car, that he dearly loved, was totaled when traffic was forced to stop due to some problem ahead and how he was then hit from the rear and then how a truck hit the car behind him and pushed them into oncoming traffic. Despite all this he escaped with no apparent serious injuries.

What is the number of our days? What twists and turns will happen on the road of life? In and through the sometimes traumatic occurrences of life, spiritual growth takes place. When we who have been born-again have faith in the Fatherhood of God, we believe he is intimately involved in our lives; therefore, we have peace in our hearts. We no longer see ourselves as victims of the ebbs and flows of what effects the masses. God is now intimately involved in every detail of our lives and therefore we are not troubled in the same way by what troubles the world. It is only when we allow doubts and fears to come upon us that we become troubled. This is why we need to keep the shield of faith constantly in hand, ready to react to the first hint of doubt. Our faith is not that we will never have problems; it is that in the midst of the problems, he is always there and an answer to every dilemma will surely come. It is a comfort that God is always on the job, so to speak, and that everything that happens to us works toward some good.

King David knew of the protections and provisions of God, but he was also aware of his personal tendencies to transgress against the righteousness of God. He was also aware that transgressing results in being disciplined. David had observed how men who bring divine displeasure upon themselves suffer. When the hand of the Lord is against an individual, loss occurs. Sometimes the problems are serious in nature, and at other times just reminders that we are not to take life lightly.

Because bad things sometimes happen to good people, we always need to be sensitive to the Lord. Some experiences are for the purpose of bringing us into a deeper awareness and appreciation for the constant care of the Lord and other experiences are a work of discipline. If we are attentive we will know the difference. I suppose anytime the subject comes up about the disciples of the Lord, we need to be very cautious not to read too much into any experience unless we know what it is. Some people who are supersensitive will always feel that God is disciplining them when something isn't just right, while others are always blaming Satan for every challenging circumstance along the road of life. Not every occurrence or problem is either Satan or God; many things are just because we live in a cursed world. It is in times when life is not going well that we are able to reach for divine strength and intervention.

David saw people who were being disciplined for sin and he didn't want any part of it. There is enough difficulty in life just from life, without adding divine displeasure to the mix. David prayed for the cleansing of the Lord in his life to prevent divine displeasure. What an example of wisdom!

Chapter Forty-one

Wait on the Lord

Psalm 40

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

¹ I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

⁴ Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

⁹ I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

¹¹ Do not withhold your mercy from me, O LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me. For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!" Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.

Waiting on the Lord will always, in due time, result in enormous blessing. This is a difficult truth for twenty first century Christians to understand. We want what we want, and we want it right now! Sometimes we are in need of being lifted up because the worldly influence around us is full of sinful ideas and behaviors. The Lord understands what we need and is available to us. The Psalmist was in a slim pit, in deep mire, symbolic language to be sure, speaking of the evil of this world and what it does to us.

On the night when Judas betrayed Jesus and Jesus was serving the last supper to his disciples, he took a towel and a basin of water and went from one disciple to the other washing their feet. When he came to Peter, Peter said, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" (John 13:6) The question was understood by the Lord to be an objection to which he replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." (John 13:7-8) We understand that Peter had a plausible reason for this, after all, shouldn't one of them have done this? Perhaps he was thinking, "This is ridiculous, where is John, he's the youngest disciple, why didn't he wash our feet! This is degrading, having our Lord and Master doing this." Peter didn't want any part of this, he flatly told the Lord never! "You shall never wash my feet!"

Then the Lord set him straight, Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." (John 13:8-9)

Living in this world is like walking on trails that are very dusty. The point Jesus was making had to do with the need we all experience in life; we need to have our walk cleansed before we eat at the masters table! Peter didn't realize the symbolism involved in what Jesus was doing. Feet represent our walk in this world or our daily life experiences. What we encounter has an affect upon us. Within the dirt we are exposed to are disease germs that can attack our health and cleansing is an important part of a healthy life style. The need to be cleansed by the Lord when coming into his presence is necessary for proper communication.

In this Psalm, David speaks of being in a slimy pit of mud and mire.

Have you ever felt that way spiritually? Just being around people of the world can make you feel like you need to go take a bath! After Peter had made his objection known and heard Jesus reply, he then said to Jesus to give him a whole bath. Jesus explained that it wasn't a bath he needed; it was only his feet that were dirty. The lesson is clear, once the blood of Jesus has cleansed us, equal to having a total bath; what is needed is to keep our feet clean. Since we live in a world that is full of sin, we need periodic times of cleansing.

I recall a song we sang when I was young, "be careful little eyes what you see; be careful little ears what you hear, etc." It makes a nice little song and has wisdom in it, but the truth is that sometimes what you hear is trust upon you, and what you see is what you must see. It isn't what

you see or hear that makes you unclean; it is the effect that it has upon you that is of concern. Mud has a way of sticking as does dust. It takes a good scrubbing to clean up the mess.

Sometimes what is needed is not just a bath; it is deliverance from the pit. How David got into the pit is not revealed, was it when he looked out upon the neighborhood and saw Bathsheba taking a bath? Possibly, or it could have been when he began to entertain lustful thoughts about her. At the first sight of her the challenge was, now what do I do? Do I continue to look, or do I go back to a safe place. It's risky to expose yourself to any situation where you can slide into a slim pit.

It could have also been when he heard about an evil plot against him. He had many enemies in his lifetime. When we know someone is out to get us, it is easy to begin to entertain thoughts of revenge. David may have been struggling enormously with thoughts unbecoming to a man of God. Sometimes these are pits from which we need our Lord to lift us because; wrong thoughts can be so persistent that human effort to control them is futile.

When a Christian falls into a sin, those who are spiritual are suppose to go and restore the person. How is this to be done? Very carefully, is the answer, lest you find yourself in a tempting situation. The fallen nature is such that when sin gets involved in our lives, it has a way of effecting the whole environment. The person doing the restoring may not be the least bit tempted to do the same sin as the fallen person, but they may be tempted to hold it against them. It's just as bad to fall from love, as it is to fall into sin. Falling from love is a violation of the one command of our Lord, to love one another.

Because David cried to the Lord from the slimy pit, and waited patiently for him, he was delivered and set upon a firm place, upon a rock. Jesus' Spirit is a firm place. It's safe to stand in his Spirit. His words are a sure foundation, and those who build their lives on him will never fall. The problem is that we sometimes wander off from the safety of the rock. It is when we get to close to the world that we hear the call to our flesh. David got to close to the tempters voice, and yielded to his suggestions because what was being offered was appealing to his fallen nature.

The result of the deliverance of the Lord was that David was given a new song to sing. I don't know the song, but it could have been one that not only had a message of praise to the Lord for his deliverance, but also a warning concerning the judgments that follow when we violate his will. The reason I say this is because the text says that those who see will fear and put their trust in the Lord. The songs of deliverance are sweet to hear, but the pain caused by a fall are real and some last a lifetime. God will deliver us from the torment of guilt over sins committed, but the results don't leave so quickly. Additionally, anytime a person allows a sin to enter his heart, the temptation to return to it lingers long after the sin has been abandoned.

Some sins are situational, that is, the temptation can lie dormant until an opportunity presents itself, and then come out with a vengeance. Seeking deliverance from the guilt of a sin should never stop short of seeking deliverance from the love for the sin.

It is good to put our trust in the Lord. The spirit of idolatry begs us to put our trust in something other than the Lord. It is pride that makes us vulnerable to misplaced faith. Proud people will sometimes humble themselves and pray to the Lord for some need that is in their life, but when the answer is not what they want to hear or is delayed, they turn on the Lord. God is never in a hurry, and his plans are eternal in nature. Looking at all that God has already done in our lives will encourage our faith. Recalling and recanting the interventions that God has sent our way encourages us to continue on.

What God is wanting of us is not a religious exercise of some kind, because the world is full of religious exercises. These don't bring us one wit closer to understanding and knowing God than before we did them. The only thing that helps us is a revelation of divine truth ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. Many people believe that if they give the Lord a good offering that he will be pleased with them, but what God wants is not an offering, though there is a need for that too, but what he wants is a daily life of devotion that involves communing with him.

David expressed the thought with the words,

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (Psalms 40:6-8)

One thing we learn about the Lord is that he wants us to be a reflection of his persona. When David came into a relationship with the Lord that involved the piercing of his ears, (a practice denoting be a servant), David was faithful to proclaim his understanding of the Lord to the great assembly.

These verses are also prophetic of the character and life of Jesus. Jesus came as the servant of the Father, to do his will, and to proclaim his righteousness to the congregation. He, like David and us need the protection of the Father because evildoers abound. As David set out these words, it was with the understanding that it is the love and truth of God that is our shield. His sins had overtaken him and he needed God to help him. Reaping time is never pleasant, and for David the time of reaping was upon him. His troubles that were the result of sins committed were bringing about circumstances from which he could not see an answer. Have your sins brought you to a point of hopelessness? David said,

Be pleased, O LORD, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!"

Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay. (Psalms 40:13-17)

Chapter Forty-Two

Be Humbly Compassionate

Psalm 41

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble.

² The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes.

³ The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.

⁴ I said, "O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you."

⁵ My enemies say of me in malice, "When will he die and his name perish?"

⁶ Whenever one comes to see me, he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers slander; then he goes out and spreads it abroad.

⁷ All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying,

⁸ "A vile disease has beset him; he will never get up from the place where he lies."

⁹ Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

¹⁰ But you, O LORD, have mercy on me; raise me up, that I may repay them.

¹¹ I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me.

¹² In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever.

¹³ Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

The Lord has compassion on those who have compassion. If we want to imitate God we will be merciful to those who are weak. It's so easy to be harsh and judgmental when we regard ourselves as being strong with regards to a sin or temptation, but we need the Lord to be with us,

to minister to us, and to heal us because we are also weak even if we don't recognize it. We too need his forgiveness for sins we have committed either knowingly or unknowingly.

We all need to have God on our side. It is a manifestation of arrogance and pride to think that we can somehow go it alone. We need to have God's loving care upon us. His blessings come to us as a result of our obedience to his will and our righteous conduct toward one another. The psalmist realized that God would preserve the life of those who are merciful to the weak. He also believed that God would minister healing to him on his sickbed and restore him to health. He was also constantly aware of those who were looking for an opportunity to overthrow him and seize his throne.

David was evidently sick at the time of this writing, but he wanted to be healed, if for no other reason, he wanted God to prove his adversaries wrong. People who spoke favorably to his face, but who were deceitful enemies behind his back surrounded him. His confidence was in the Lord, however, and he believed God for a proper end to his life. Good men who live for the Lord faithfully, pleasing him in all their ways can look forward to a proper end to life and a glorious entry into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

David seemed to labor under the idea that sickness was the result of sin in his life, a common teaching among those who seek to explain why some people are not healed when prayers are offered for them. Perhaps David did commit a sin that he and God alone knew about. When a person sins against God, a lifting of divine protection occurs and things that could happen but wouldn't happen if divine protection were present, do happen. When we pray for forgiveness of sins we regain that protective cover as God responds to our repentant heart and extends mercy. It is a mistake, however, to assume that sickness is always caused by sin in our lives. Sin does cause sickness at times; there is no doubt about that, hangovers, headaches from over indulgence, venereal diseases, and such like are very direct cause and effect type sicknesses.

There is a difference between judgment and results. Many sins have a result that is directly attributable to a sin. This is not judgment in the sense of a divine act against us; that's just what happens to people who sin. If a person gets drunk and crashes his car while intoxicated, it is result not judgment. There are many such occurrences that are directly attributable to sin, but when God assigns a person to hell, that is judgment.

There are many sicknesses that are the result of just living life. No particular sin is involved; it just has to do with conditions that exist as a result of the fall of man. When attempting to minister healing to someone who is sick it is wise to refrain from trying to determine the cause, leave that to the person and God. Not all people who are prayed for will be healed in an immediate sense, but all Christians will be healed. Some people receive an immediate manifestation of healing power, while others wait for it. What is important is that we show love and encouragement. God is so involved in our lives that every occurrence is an opportunity for God to work some aspect of his divine purposes. If no one ever had a need, those how need to learn to serve the needs of others would never have an opportunity to serve.

There seems to be an abundance of individuals who somehow feel that it is there business to see to it that everyone is healed in the immediate sense, and if it doesn't occur want to condemn them as being short of faith or sinful in there hearts. Some people even take pleasure in seeing someone suffer if they think they had it coming because of some shortcoming in their life, shame on us. We all deserve the judgment of death! Every act of divine healing is an act of love and grace on God's part. No one ever deserves to be healed, but when God grants healings and miracles, it should always be an opportunity to praise him for his wonderful love and mercy.

Chapter Forty-three

A Word of Encouragement

Psalm 42

For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" ⁴ These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. ⁵ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and ⁶ my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. ⁸ By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹ I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" ¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

¹¹ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

When pride has finally given way to true humility, and when the spirit of man cries for the spirit of holiness to flood his soul, then and only then can he pant for God from the deepest recesses of his heart!

In every soul there is a thirsting for the true and living God, but not all seek to know him in the right way. Satan is always nearby somewhere, in someone or something trying to call us to what is only a fantasy water pool to drink of his false pleasures telling us that this is what we thirst for, but he is a liar.

Oh, we may go and partake of his offerings, but after the transitory pleasures have failed to satisfy, we sit all alone in the deepest kind of loneliness, because alas we left God back at the point where we chose pleasure over joy, where we followed the sin crazed crowd to the fleshly pursuits of pride, leaving the throng of the blood bought souls going to the house of the Lord to worship and rejoice—ah—such soul satisfying worship!

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (Psalms 42:5) Because you forgot to turn to the eternal, that alone is of true substance. All substance is passive substance that is of this world. When he who sits in the heavens concludes that the usefulness of this present world with all its wonders has been served and from this caldron of suffering has created the finest specimens of his creative genius and power and his heart is satisfied, all that is of this present realm will vanish as a vapor.

People, once lost in sin and debauchery, in whom was found a hunger in the deep of their hearts, and out from the falseness of sinful desires, emerge to seek the living and eternal God. He lives in a realm that is so far superior to anything that is of this present life, and when we come to him, we find love, joy, peace and a fellowship with God, a God who is real, really real, and always totally honest!

These precious souls are pictured as gems; gems that were formed in the crust of the earth as the pressures of forces, we can only vaguely understand, have exerted themselves causing fracturing and crushing of the earth's crust. The waters beneath are drawn toward the surface through the fractures and are mixed with the elements and chemicals that have been liberated under the pressure of the fracturing, and upon coming in contact with other elements and chemicals cause gems and minerals to form.

So it is with the souls of humanity. This world has been designed to work upon the souls of men in such a way as to sometimes harden them and at other times to crush them, but in it all, the master designer is at work creating conditions that when the water of the Holy Spirit is allowed to touch it, transforms the pain into eternal character that is most pleasing to God. There is no lasting value to any form of pain or suffering, but what it produces in us when mixed with the love of God produces eternal qualities likened unto gems.

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (Psalms 42:5) Because you haven't seen what God sees.

There are people who are subjected to the wealth of the world. Either they have the wealth as a personal possession or they are around those who do. It's easy to look upon the success and glory that wealth can bring and to confuse it with what is real.

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (Psalms 42:5) Because we look down, seeing only the circumstances of our lives, rather than up into the face of God where we see love and are filled with hope, and from hope springs faith that is always rewarded when fixed on the graciousness of God.

There is something wondrously mysterious about the heart of God. From his great love comes a call that those whose hearts are attuned can hear, expressed by the Psalmist as "deep calls to deep." He heard it as he sat by a waterfall; having experienced what was described as waves and breakers sweeping over him. The lashing and beating of waves and breaker on a seashore produce all manner of beauty, just as the Psalmist was pondering as a result of what was happening to him, heard the voice of God in the roar of the waterfall.

I sometimes think of God as sitting at a computer with a big screen in front of him. On that screen he has created the massive heavens with all the galaxies and stars and everything else that is in it. He then picked a speck on the screen that was a planet he called earth. He then zoomed in on it and placed all manner of creatures. Now these creatures, along with all the substances of the earth are really only electronic. They consist of electrons, neutrons, protons and whatever else that may be too beyond us to comprehend, but it is made visible on the screen that God sees. Like a technician that works with the picture on the screen, so God is at work creating from what is seen something that will work in his eternal realm.

All that we call substance may appear to be very tangible and real as we interact with one another, but to God all he has to do is turn off the power that makes it all work—and—well you get the picture, what seems so tangible isn't as solid and enduring as it seemed to us, after all, we are only electronic particles held together by a mysterious power called his word. Paul in writing to the church of Colosse stated that Jesus is the one who holds all things together. In other words he is the source of the cohesive power that holds every atom, molecule or structure together.

All of this exists by his will and for his purposes and when he is through with it, like a technician sitting before a computer screen who hits the delete button and the screen goes blank, so God will remove the cohesive force that holds all this together and dispose of it. God lives in another realm, one that is of different substances, not of the sort of materials that make up this world, but rather, of durable substances into which we are invited to live. We were once of the earth, but when we called to him he marked us with a mark and committed us to memory until the appointed time when we will be transformed into the likeness of his Son Jesus and given an eternal quality of life so that we can dwell with him eternally.

Does God ever forget us? The psalmist felt like he did. He, like many people, asked the question, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" (Psalms 42:9-10) God never changes. Like the North Pole, he is always there. We become confused and disoriented, but all we have to do is look up, away from all that is earthy, and we will see that he is there for us.

Chapter Forty-four

Hope in the Lord

Psalm 43

¹ Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. ² You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? ³ Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. ⁴ Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

⁵ Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

In Psalms forty-three the psalmist picks up the theme concerning the turmoil caused by wicked men within the nation. He feels his need for vindication from God and asks God to plead his cause. He has rightly made God his stronghold, but finds it difficult to understand why God doesn't take a more active role in what is happening.

It is my observation that God wants us as his people to take the initiative and act in a forthright and responsible manner up to the point where we have done all that we can reasonably be expected to do and at that point we reach to him for what we cannot do. God is the source of wisdom and knowledge and those who walk with him and talk with him find answers to what is needed in their lives. When what is needed is not available through the normal channels, God's supernatural power is then available to accomplish his will. This is where the prayer of faith and intercession is exercised to turn the heart of God toward the provision of an answer for us. The teachings of Jesus on the subject such as about the unjust judge, and the man who was in bed but a neighbor needed his help are instructive to help us understand that the heart of God can be appealed to with good results when the occasion is right.

In Psalms forty-two and forty three, the psalmist is downcast due to pressing circumstances and God doesn't seem to notice or care. He is convinced that God is trustworthy, and therefore has made him his rock and fortress; he has trusted in him and knows that in the end all will be well, but he being human needs encouragement and help. God always encourages us to come to him and when we fail to do so is displeased with us. On the one hand God tells us to be strong and courageous and encourages us to do what is the normal course of action in a situation, but at the same time to seek his help and intervention.

After basic growth has taken place further development and growth happen as conditions of stress are applied. Body builders know this, so they press themselves to the limits of their capabilities time and time again and the result is their capacity increases as their body responds to the current demand.

There is a parallel spiritual truth concerning spiritual growth. When we press ourselves to the limits of our natural abilities and reach for divine intervention, growth in Christian character and power result. Faith is like a muscle that develops strength with use. The more we commit to prayer and receive answers for, the more we are able to commit to prayer and believe for answers. Likewise, when we are in a situation of stress and turn to the Lord and find comfort, instruction and power to cope, the stronger our Christian character gets.

The psalmist was wrestling with circumstances that seemed to be beyond him, but what was worse he apparently had expectations concerning what he felt God should do for him and since it wasn't happening the way he thought that it should was confused and perhaps a little angry.

Some in their eagerness to teach people to believe God for answers have also taught false hopes and caused perplexity in the life of the person who has been incorrectly taught. I see God as being like a father who is teaching his child to ride a bicycle, he will hold the bicycle upright and walk along all the while encouraging the child to steer and peddle. As the child begins to learn balance he will remove his hand just enough so that the child is doing the riding, but is still near enough to catch him if he starts to fall. Eventually the child can ride the bicycle without the aid of the father, but there are other lessons in life still to be learned and the father is still there to teach the child.

Some people seem to feel that if God ever stops walking along side them when they are riding their bicycle that he has forsaken them. That is not the case. God does expect us to learn to function naturally in situations where we are able to do so. This is normal spiritual development. Just because we are not always conscious of his hand steadying us or feel his presence or love does not mean that it is not there. There are times when God is more directly involved with us than at other times, but he is still there. He may leave us to act and react according to what he has taught us and allow us to even make mistakes, but he is still monitoring what is taking place and if we call upon him he will answer us. God is loving and kind and always faithful. Call on him and he will answer. His answer may only be, I am here, and I see that you're doing just fine. Keep it up!"

The psalmist wanted to be involved with the knowledge that comes from the Lord. He therefore, asked for the light and truth of God to lead him because he knew he would be led to the house of the Lord. All truth that emanates from the Lord also leads us to the Lord. The desire for the Lord and what he can teach us is characteristic of those who love God. When the Lord is involved in our quest for knowledge, all so called knowledge that denies God will be automatically disqualified as being pure truth.

The cure for a down cast heart is, as it has always been, to hope in God. Without hope mental and emotional illness are just around the corner. People lacking in hope are prime targets for suicidal spirits that bring as their allies discouragement, despair and often bitterness and anger. Why are you downcast? For lack of hope! Faith rests on the foundation of hope and without faith it is impossible to please God.

Chapter Forty-five

Has God Forsaken Us?

Psalm 44

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A *maskil*.

We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. ² With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. ³ It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.

⁴ You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. ⁵ Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. ⁶ I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; ⁷ but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. ⁸ In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. *Selah*

⁹ But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. ¹⁰ You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. ¹¹ You gave us up to be devoured like sheep

and have scattered us among the nations. ¹² You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale.

¹³ You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. ¹⁴ You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us. ¹⁵ My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame ¹⁶ at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.

¹⁷ All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. ¹⁸ Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. ¹⁹ But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness.

²⁰ If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, ²¹ would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? ²² Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

²³ Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. ²⁴ Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?

²⁵ We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. ²⁶ Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love.

Job was a righteous man, perfect in all his ways. We know that because God said so. One day, out of nowhere from Job's point of view, everything began to change. Job was still being faithful to God and carrying out his righteous lifestyle, but it seemed that all hell broke loose against him. His children were all killed, all his possessions were taken away as one disaster after another struck him and finally he himself broke out with boils all over his body. All he had left was his wife and his integrity of heart, but even his wife entered into a sinful attitude and told him to curse God and die.

How much worse could it get? Well, Job then received some visitors who thought they were wise men, so they came to give counsel to Job. They were sure that what was happening to Job was due to some sin or hidden flaw that he was being judged for.

There were and are some things about God that are not clearly understood by many people. When God sees a person who has a heart that is right before him, he then sets them apart for special purposes.

The first item on his agenda is to establish correct communications with that person. Their relationship with each other must come under scrutiny and some quality issues must be settled.

In the case of Job, after all speeches were made, Job still contended that he was not guilty of any transgressions. Finally, he reasoned that God had made a mistake and wished for a special consultation with God so that this could be straightened out! God granted a special visitation, but when he did he set about to straighten Job out on some issues. Job's concept of God was flawed, as was revealed by his conclusion that God had made a mistake. The truth was that God is much bigger, wiser, and more profound in his ways than any man can begin to understand. Job needed to see his God in a much better light and when he did, he saw how flawed and small he was by comparison. This is the secret of true communication with God, when we put all our issues to rest and simply worship God and fully trust him in all we do.

In Psalms 44, the psalmist starts by recounting how God is the reason for the existence of the nation of Israel. He also acknowledges that it was not by their brilliance or strength in battle that victory was achieved. In the mind of the psalmist they had been faithful to the Lord and had not turned away from him. This was likely a short-term analysis since historically they were often unfaithful and God had to discipline them repeatedly for their idolatry. At the time of the writing of this psalm he was probably correct in his analysis. Certainly, if God allowed Job to go through what he did for higher purposes than judgment and blessing, then could the nation of Israel be exempted from the possibility of similar dealings?

We need to come to the understanding that not everything that happens is simple judgment or blessing. Judgment and blessing is baby Christian kind of dealings. Once the son who God loves has gone through the purging process and is fully set apart unto the Lord, God moves on to the more important issue of bringing about a mature relationship that is based on faith and trust. When we come to the point where we are no longer pondering our status with the Lord or his love

for us, but rather are totally comfortable in the knowledge that no matter what happens God doesn't change nor does our relationship with him, we have arrived at a level of maturity ready for more mature dealings. Some people never get beyond basic fundamentals of their relationship. They are still unsure about such issues as, does God really love me, or does he really care about every detail of my life? Once we are absolutely confident of where we stand with God, then God is able to use us however he chooses without worrying about whether we will be offended or destroyed in the process.

As a minister I find that God often deals with people around me in ways that are difficult to watch, but in the end bring such joy and blessing as I see them emerging into giants of character and faith. I once told the Lord that I believe in him and that from that point on he didn't have to worry about me because the issues were settled, that if he wanted to deal with people around me in ways that would cause me consternation, that would be alright because I resolved to not take it personal. My faith is firmly fixed on the fact that Jesus died for my sins and that I live in his care every day. I know that if I need correction, he will give it, but I have also learned that some forms of suffering are for those around me and that what I go through is because I am a part of what God is doing in them.

The psalmist was expressing consternation at what he was seeing in the national life of the nation of Israel. It appeared to him that God had forsaken his people without just cause and this brought him anxiety because it didn't seem to him that this is the way it should be. Our idea about God is that what he is looking for is robotic obedience and when that is happening, blessings should result. The idea that God has intentions that goes beyond such an immature level may seem absurd, but looking at the story of Job we see that God does in fact have purposes of a grander scope, and that establishing issues of love and trust are a prerequisite to those grander purposes.

These were God's special people and as such he desired to have a special kind of relationship with them. Before mature relationship can be established, proper respect must be established between those seeking relationship. In the case of Job, he had one problem. I won't call it a flaw because God said he was perfect in all his ways. The problem with Job was that though he loved God and obeyed him, he also underestimated him. He seemed to feel that God was in violation of his principle in allowing the things to happen that had happened to him. He didn't understand that maybe, just maybe, God was capable of greater things than he gave him credit for. When the stage was fully set, then God spoke to Job about the vast disparity that existed between them. Understanding that God has eternal plans in view and that we are locked in a time sensitive and transitory existence with limited capabilities and insights is a revelation that God desires to bring us into. When we can say to God from a truly pure heart full of faith and total trust, not my will but your will be done, we are then candidates for blessings that go beyond the norm.

In Job's mind, he was too big and God was too small! Job was a wise man, but when he thought that God was capable of error, he grossly underestimated God. No true communion of spirit can occur when such miscalculations exist. After Job repented of his miscalculation he was then in a unique position with God. Those who were his accusers were now instructed to let him pray for them because God would listen to Job! When we finally arrive at the point where we are willing for God to begin to reveal to us the extent of the grandeur of his being, and realize that we can never be his counselor, we are ready for an adventurous journey into a mature understanding of God.

God had not forsaken Israel as the psalmist charged, but rather was using them for purposes that they had no idea about at that point in time. When what we are doing and what God is doing are not in sync, we need to go to God and find out what it is that is happening. Why is God not going to battle with us? Are we still seeking his guidance or are we taking it for granted that if a war needs to be fought we should fight it? Sometimes we think that God has forsaken us, but what has really happened is that we have taken our focus off what he wants and have begun to do what we want.

Chapter Forty-six

Prepare for a Wedding

Psalm 45

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A *maskil*. A wedding song.

¹ My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer. ² You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. ³ Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. ⁴ In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds. ⁵ Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. ⁶ Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. ⁷ You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. ⁸ All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad. ⁹ Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.

¹⁰ Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father's house. ¹¹ The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord. ¹² The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift, men of wealth will seek your favor.

¹³ All glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold. ¹⁴ In embroidered garments she is led to the king; her virgin companions follow her and are brought to you. ¹⁵ They are led in with joy and gladness; they enter the palace of the king.

¹⁶ Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land. ¹⁷ I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.

Jesus is the king most glorious, the subject of the poet's song, most excellent among men, anointed with grace and glory. Jesus is a mighty warrior; one who rides forth to subdue the nations, to install truth and righteousness in the earth. He comes seeking a glorious bride, a bride who seeks to please him. He comes speaking peace to those who will listen offering words of forgiveness and love. Jesus is a mighty warrior going to battle against every form of evil that is opposed to those who love him. Jesus is pictured in this psalm as having his sword at his side indicating that it is ready for use but is in a non-threatening mode, he is not the enemy of humanity, only the sinful, his enemies alone should fear him because justice is his scepter.

The purpose of God is to separate and define righteousness and evil. He is desirous of a relationship with people who are totally through with sin and evil. The word declares that to the pure, all things are pure. When our hearts are pure, our whole being is pure. Every desire is now fixed upon what is righteous and pure before God. Pure fellowship with God occurs when our hearts are fixed upon the glory of his being. When we become acquainted with the true nature of love and the glory of the character of Christ and the wholesomeness of God, when we are enthralled with the mind of God that is pervasive and comprehensive, we are then able to really worship.

The scene is that of a bride being presented to the bridegroom, both having prepared themselves for the occasion. This is a special occasion, therefore no casual attire will do.

The New Testament pictures the bride as being dressed in a gown that is without spot or wrinkle. This bride didn't attain this beauty from her native status, because; she comes from a fallen race with sinfulness and evil being her native nature. Before she could be presented in this

way to the king, she had to be redeemed by the blood sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It is only after she believes on him and receives pardon and cleansing from him, that she is then prepared and dressed in the garment of his presentation. This bride had nothing of herself to offer, therefore, he sent the Holy Spirit to prepare her for a holy habitation. She had to be cleansed, trained, educated, and refined in the ways of holiness before the final presentation could be made.

In the book, Song of Solomon, the story is of a girl who is a shepherdess working with her sheep. She is suntanned and weathered from being outdoors. The king passes by and sees her and sees beyond the exterior flaws and sees beauty waiting to be brought forth. She is brought in to be prepared, but a process of preparations will be needed. Finally she is brought into his presence and the two fall desperately in love. The love grows and matures and finally the question is asked, "Who is this coming out of the wilderness leaning on her beloved?" The answer is not given, but we know the answer, it is the picture of Christians who have learned to trust and lean upon the care of the Lord Jesus through hard and difficult life experiences.

A wonderful day is coming when what is pictured in Psalms, prophecies and words of promise will become living reality, as the bride of Christ is united with the Lord Jesus Christ at the wedding feast prepared for us all to enjoy. We will all be like him then, prepared as a bride for the bridegroom with the full revelation of exactly who he is and what he is all about. On that day all theological questions will lose their appeal and all that will matter is that we are with him and will be with him forever and forever. We won't teach theology any more because the reality of his presence will say it all. We will all be in perfect unity then having found that our common denominator is Jesus. There will not be any super Christians in that crowd, only people who were once hopelessly lost sinners who have been brought near by the Blood of the Lamb! We will all rejoice together because we will all know that Jesus is the only reason we can be in such a wonderful place.

Chapter Forty-seven

Never Fear, Help is Near

Psalm 46

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to *alamoth*. A song.

¹God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. *Selah*

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

⁸Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

The revelation that God is our refuge sometimes comes a little late in our lives. It is easy to suffer through turmoil and stress, never understanding how much peace there is in knowing that God is always in control.

The author of this psalm had finally arrived at the understanding that God's love and care are absolutely unshakable. The place to look for supportive evidence of the existence of God and his love is not in what is happening in the world around us, but rather it is an internal condition of faith in the unseen presence of God.

There is never a reason for God's people to fear; the psalmist says, "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." (Psalms 45:2-3) What events in life are more catastrophic than the earth giving way and falling into the sea? I live in California and for many years I have heard predictions that California is destined to fall into the sea. Someone said that the ocean has undermined the coast and that it is a shelf that extends into the ocean. Those doomsday prognosticators make their predictions and sow fear into the hearts of those who don't understand that for those who trust in the Lord the future is a great one, even if the whole nation fell into the sea.

No matter what is happening on planet earth, God is always and eternally the same. God has placed limits on all that happens here, and we can count on every event that God has predicted will come to pass. Earthquakes happen and erratic weather patterns disrupt what is considered normal, but even if it seems the whole earth is breaking apart, everything is still being held within the boundaries established, and God has not lost control.

We now have the knowledge that, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God." (Psalms 46:4) In the time of the writing of this psalm, the city of God was Jerusalem. Streams of water were of inestimable value as any and all life was dependent upon water for survival.

Since then the Messiah, Jesus has come, the nation of Israel rejected him and crucified him, but he lives in the hearts of all those that receive him, whether Jew or Gentile.

This body of people are sometimes known as the church, at other times the body of Christ, and also the bride of Christ, also they are known as the temple and are described in Revelations as the New Jerusalem.

In the vernacular of the church, the river of God is within, springing up as a well of water unto everlasting life. The river is also symbolic of the Holy Spirit that is imparted to each believer at salvation. Once while Jesus was visiting Jerusalem on "the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." (John 6:37-39)

The river of God began to flow from the side of Jesus when the soldier pierced his side with a spear after he died on the cross. It now continues to flow from the heart of God into sinners as they repentantly call on him to save them and redeem them from slavery to sin and Satan.

The psalmist went on to say, "God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts." (Psalms 46:5) This is now the status of those who have received the Lord Jesus as Savior.

Sometimes when we look at what is happening; we may wonder why does evil go unrestrained? The answer is that the last chapter of the history of man has not been experienced yet. God is still making war with evil, and will continue to do so until full and complete victory is his. Those who know the Lord recognize the truth that when we hear the voice of God in our inner man, the earthiness in us melts as we stand in awe of his majesty! Meanwhile, while we wait for the final hour, we are instructed to stand still and know that God is God. The knowledge that God is in full control will bring peace to our hearts.

Chapter Forty-eight

The Great King is the LORD Most High!

Psalm 47

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹ Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. ² How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth! ³ He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. ⁴ He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. *Selah*

⁵ God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. ⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. ⁸ God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. ⁹ The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

“Clap your hands, all you nations,” God is indeed worthy of our highest praise. To say anything else about him is folly of the highest order. People of shallow thoughts question God, but people of understanding extol his name.

We are here because God put us here. We are his creation and he has absolute power over every part of our existence. The incredible thing about God is that he has given humanity power to determine what takes place on this planet to a very large extent, and will hold us accountable for what we allow and do. God is searching the hearts of men looking for people who will walk honorably before him. A day of great victory is awaiting the people of God when the Lord Almighty puts a final end to all that is evil and retains all that is good from this world.

“Sing praises to God; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth.” (Psalms 47:6-7) is a statement that is both factual and prophetic. Factual in the sense that he is fully in charge of all that goes on and prophetic in the sense that there is a day coming when all the earth will declare him the absolute authority, not only in the abstract sense but in the literal and real sense. Jesus is coming back to this earth to exercise absolute power on the earth. The words of the prophets are clear on this point. In Revelations, Jesus is seen coming riding on a white horse with a name written on his thigh, “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” (Rev. 19:16) Our Father gave all power and authority to him, and his coming again is certain. The nobles of the nations will assemble as the people of the God of Abraham. The kings of the earth will also acknowledge they belong to him.

Until then let the singers sing, the musicians play, the artists paint, the preachers preach, the writers write and those with other talents and gifts continue to show forth his praise until he calls us home to ever be with the Lord. There is no greater praise than for human beings to express their gifts and talents unto the Lord, always giving praise to him as the giver of the gift.

Chapter Forty-nine

Jerusalem

Psalm 48

A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah.

¹ Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. ² It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. ³ God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress.

⁴ When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, ⁵ they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror. ⁶ Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. ⁷ You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind.

⁸ As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever. *Selah*

⁹ Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. ¹⁰ Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness. ¹¹ Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments.

¹² Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, ¹³ consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. ¹⁴ For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. How majestic is the city that is a shadow of the glory of God! The city is not the glory; nevertheless, it stirs wonderful ideas in the minds of those who behold it, especially for the first time. There is something wonderful about the city that goes beyond the actual beauty of the buildings, streets and walls; it is God's presence dwelling in its citadels that is the glory of it.

Look at what happens to the ungodly people of the earth when they see the glory of God; their faces are filled with horror! Why? Because they are filled with sinful deeds and have never repented before God!

The Bible is a continuing revelation from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelations. It is the story of the Holy God who created all that is and was pleased with his creation. Then Satan entered the scene in the form of a talking serpent, and upon encountering Eve changed the course of history. The rest of the story is about what it means to live having to experience the reality of both good and evil. God is overseeing the history of humanity, though he seldom interferes.

God gave humanity the ability to make choices, and as a result, what happens is largely the result of those choices. When God does intervene it is usually because people have called upon him in earnest prayer. God does reach out to humanity as an action of his love and mercy and often intervenes even when there are no prayers or if prayers are offered, they are offered in

inappropriate ways, but because God is good, he overlooks the ignorance of those who have not been taught what is right and proper.

There comes a point, however, when God desires to reveal himself to mankind so that they can become recipients of his provision of forgiveness and impart to them the gift of eternal life. The revelation of God is not intended to strike terror into the hearts of humanity, but rather to lead to the message of hope. Some see the glory of God and are terrified and run from him. Some people run from God because they think he is against them, but he is not! All he wants to do is bless us! When people are convicted of sinful living, it is because God desires to remove what hinders our fellowship and to deliver us from the harmful results of wrongdoing.

The city of God is a wonderful place. It is situated in a high and lofty place. Now I know that most people think of the city of Jerusalem, and when this Psalm was written the beauty of this glorious city no doubt inspired the author, but for me when I think of the city of God, my mind turns to the treasures of truth that I have been allow to see and understand. Getting to know the Lord is such a blessing, but only those whose hearts are tender and pure can appreciate it. I have in a sense been taken through this wonderful place and been allow to view the wonder of divine character, experience love as no human can love, and been shown the measure of grace that allows sinners of every kind to come and find forgiveness, deliverance, restoration, love and acceptance into the glory of the presence of Almighty God. None of this can happen to a person unless Jesus is the means by which it is received. There is no other name that is given among men by which a person can receive forgiveness of sins and become a candidate to receive the gift of eternal life. All other names are dead-end roads that only lead to despair and anguish.

Some people are traveling on the road called Buddhism, but Buda didn't die for the sins of the world. Others are on the road of Islam, but Mohammed is not the Savior of the world. These and many more like them only provide a false hope. They have many good teachings and wise sayings, but at the end of life only the blood of Jesus washes away the sin guilt of a human heart. Like a ticket master allows access to a boat or ship, train or plane, so God stands at heavens door checking the tickets that are presented to him by those desiring to enter his glory after death has removed them from this life experience. There is only one ticket that God has authorized; it is faith in his one and only Son who died for the sins of the world.

Lest we dwell too much upon the spiritual concepts, let's look at the more material side of the subject of the city of God. The city was a symbol of power in the day when this Psalm was written. Its walls were high and impenetrable; of course, this was before jet planes and guided missiles with highly explosive warheads. It was also before the army from Babylon came and tore it all down. The city was a mighty stronghold for many generations, but its strength was neither its geographical location nor the strength of its walls, nor was it the mighty army that defended it. The strength of the city was God's protection and care. When the hand of God is over people there is a protection that keeps the enemies at bay. Things that could happen don't happen, because God prevents it or exposes the plots so that those in authority can deal with them. This kind of care is well known to those who live in the care of the Lord.

As this is being written we as a nation have just suffered the loss of the World Trade Center and at present an undisclosed number of casualties. Some have laid the blame at the doorstep of those in our society that have not only committed heinous sins such as abortions or approved of them. Others add to this the sins of homosexuals and many such sexual sins. Still other offensive sins in our society have to do with the allowance for religious sins. The most offensive sin in the eyes of God without a doubt is the rejection of Jesus, his love gift to the world.

Why did this catastrophe befall this nation? Did God sanction it or cause it to happen? No of course God did not, but what has happened has been a drifting farther and farther away from a faith that is firmly founded upon the understanding that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and that acceptance of him in faith is the only means to salvation. Because faith in him is the only way to receive the protection of the Lord, rejection of him moves us out from under that protective cover. Our nation hasn't totally rejected the message of Jesus, just put it on the back

burner, so to speak. What has happened politically has been the elevation of other beliefs to equal or greater acceptance and by doing this has lessened divine protection. The farther we drift from the firm belief in Jesus as the only savior of the world, the less we will enjoy divine protection.

As much as I respect others and their right to be heard, we dare not forget that acceptance of Jesus is not an option. God, not man, assigned him the title “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. Every nation will have to acknowledge him and accept him or fall under the judgment of God.

When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror. Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. (Psalms 48:4-7)

Why would people flee in terror from the mere sight of a city? If history tells us anything then we would conclude that it is more than the city that armies often see when they attack the Israelis; they often see visions of supernatural beings defending the armies of Israel. Stories have come from recent wars that have been fought over the Israelite territory of apparent angelic beings assisting the Israelis war efforts and preserving them from great loss of lives. In Bible days when the people of Israel served the Lord, nations that might have attacked them didn't because God restrained their desires, but when the Israelis turned from serving the Lord and sought and worshiped foreign Gods, the hand of God would be lifted and enemies would move against them. There are stories about divine deliverances that God gave Israel when they turned to him that are thrilling to read about.

Chapter Fifty

The Eminency of the Final Call

Psalm 49

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹ Hear this, all you peoples; listen, all who live in this world, both low and high, rich and poor alike: My mouth will speak words of wisdom; the utterance from my heart will give understanding. I will turn my ear to a proverb; with the harp I will expound my riddle:

⁵ Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me— ⁶ those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? ⁷ No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him— ⁸ the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough— ⁹ that he should live on forever and not see decay.

¹⁰ For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others. ¹¹ Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves.

¹² But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

¹³ This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. *Selah* ¹⁴ Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. ¹⁵ But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. *Selah*

¹⁶ Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; ¹⁷ for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. ¹⁸ Though while he lived he counted himself blessed— and men praise you when you prosper— ¹⁹ he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life.

²⁰ A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish.

Listen up; are you rich or poor, young or old? It doesn't matter; wisdom is for everyone.

There is one inescapable truth, every person will face the inevitable, this life will end and then what? It seems that death is a fact that all understand, but what about life? Some people feel that to give life meaning one must do something that can be seen as a contribution to the well being of society. Making a positive difference is seen as the means whereby they will achieve immortality. Is this "immortality" of any advantage after all is said and done?

History is full of the achievements of individuals, nations and empires that have become distant memories, having been replaced by others. In the world of sports, records are set only to be broken. Some records stand for a few weeks or months but all seem to fall to someone stronger, faster or smarter.

In the midst of a changing world, there is still one unchangeable truth; there is a God who never changes, never has and never will. There is still another truth that never changes, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Heb. 9:27-28)

No amount of wealth or fame will matter on the Day of Judgment to which we are appointed. Only one thing will matter, did you believe on Jesus and look for his appearing?

Some people are very concerned about the Second Coming of Christ at the end of this present age. I too look forward to that glorious event, but I am very conscious that Jesus could come for me at any given moment, even if I'm not alive at the time of that great event.

I have heard many predictions and sermons about the eminency of the return of Christ for his church, but all the while I have been preaching sermons at funerals of people that past from this life, to ever be with the Lord. For them there was a much more eminent call coming than the final call to the church.

Some people have failed to live their lives with long-term plans because they thought that Christ would come for the church before their life was fully lived. Others have done what Jesus warned about when he said that some would say that the master delays his coming and would begin to live licentiously, not understanding that there was another call that can come at any moment, and unless someone calls you back from the dead or resuscitates you, it is as final as the last call will be.

I live my life with the knowledge that he can call me at any moment he wishes to, but I also live with the faith that, that call will only come for me when he is ready for it to come. I, as a child of God, do not live in the fear of premature death, having placed my faith in him. I wait for his appearing and when it comes, I will answer with joyful reply—even so come quickly Lord Jesus.

Chapter Fifty-one

God is a Personal God

Psalm 50

A psalm of Asaph.

¹The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. ²From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. ³Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages. ⁴He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people: ⁵“Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” ⁶And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge. *Selah*

⁷“Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. ⁸I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. ⁹I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, ¹⁰for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. ¹²If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. ¹³Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? ¹⁴Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

¹⁶But to the wicked, God says: “What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? ¹⁷You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. ¹⁸When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. ¹⁹You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. ²⁰You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother’s son. ²¹These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.

²²“Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue: ²³He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.”

What does God want of us? What could we give to God that he doesn’t already have in abundance? There is one thing that God lacks that we can give him; that one thing is our heart! No one else’s heart will do, only ours. It is an individual thing because God is a God of individual relationship. God calls to his people collectively, but loves individually. Like a shepherd who knows his every sheep by name, so God loves us individually and knows our name. There is a unique place in the heart of God for each individual, and if we rebel against him there is an unfulfilled place in his heart.

God is a mighty God, power pours forth from him in an indescribable measure. When God comes forth, a fire devours before him and a tempest rages around him, yet he dwells quietly among righteous men whispering into their inner heart words of love and tenderness. Though God’s power is enormous to contemplate, yet fearlessly the righteous approach his mighty throne, often not noticing how graciously he protects us from the power that would otherwise consume us! Though God’s power is incalculable so is his love. God is an emotional God. Love is an emotion, and God is love; hate is an emotion and God hates evil. When we are in rebellion against God, God’s love tempers God’s anger with compassion, knowing that we are like sheep not understanding the great love of the shepherd, so he seeks us until he finds us, and with tender love he calls us back to the safety of his care.

God hurts for his people who break covenant with him. He has committed himself to us in a love relationship that only we can break. God does not take it lightly when we rebel against him, nor does he mete out judgment lightly, but if he must, he will say depart from me you worker of evil.

The heart of God calls to us, “Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” (Psalms 50:14-15) This is what God desires; first that we give thanks to him. In doing this we are acknowledging that God is not only in charge of our lives, but also that he does all things in the light of what is best for us. It is that knowledge when embraced that enables us to fulfill our vows to him even in a day of trouble, but alas, we are invited to call upon him, and the promise is that he will deliver us. If we have offered our thank offering to him in the manner that is pleasing to God, we will be able to accept the kind of deliverance in our lives that he will bring.

When we come to God humbly and repentantly we are met with the cleansing power of his blood that was shed for us, and the Holy Spirit cleanses us and prepares us to live with him eternally in heaven. All sins are washed away, as is the consciousness of our former sinful state. We are now new creations in Christ Jesus, made ready to live in our heavenly home. This

miracle is a wonder beyond human comprehension, but is given without the requirement of understanding it all. God wants just one thing; he wants thank offerings because they prepare the way for salvation!

Chapter Fifty-two

Repentance

Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. ¹⁴ Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

¹⁸ In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. ¹⁹ Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

David was King of Israel. As such, he had a level of respect that resulted from his position of power. Since polygamy was being practiced in the nation of Israel, men were accustomed to having roving eyes and hearts. Even in a polygamous society such as Israel, there were boundaries beyond which one dare not proceed. The marriage bonds were sacred and one must not transgress against another man's wife. Polygamy was not promiscuity even though some men had several wives. Outside the bonds of marriage all sexual contact was strictly forbidden. Because men were allowed to marry more than one woman, the idea of shopping around was always potentially there.

In our society, especially our Christian society, men and women are supposed to be single minded and single hearted toward their married partner. Any wandering from this relationship of heart or mind is recognized to spring from sin in the heart of an individual. Some people think its fun to play around with this strict concept of singleness of heart and allow for flirtatious encounters rationalizing that its harmless and no one is being hurt.

One day as King David was on his housetop overlooking the city, he saw a woman taking a bath and was attracted to her physical beauty. He may have felt justified in looking at her

reasoning that after all he was the king and if she were available, what would it matter if he married another woman?

Whether David, or any of the men of Israel, thought that looking upon a woman lustfully was an act that sprang from a heart of sin or not, I do not know, but once David allowed the process to begin, he was standing on a very slippery slope.

Men and women are being challenged in our society in ways that only a few years ago were unheard of. Men and women are being partnered up at the workplace in jobs that require close contact and cooperation in ways that tend to develop into friendships and can also lead to flirtatious and sinful attitudes. The dangers are especially acute when an individual is seen as being a person of power and influence and the working partner is vulnerable due to some lack in themselves or their life situation. Add to the mix physical attractiveness and you have a recipe for trouble if not sin.

King David already had a harem of women; therefore, we have to exclude any idea that he might have had some physical need that was going unfulfilled, thus making him vulnerable. Physical need is not an acceptable excuse for lust, because people who are well fulfilled often have the greatest problem with lust. Lust is a spirit of sinfulness that invades the life of a person and has nothing to do with sexual desire. Love and lust are true enemies, but some misguided people think that if they lack a feeling of lust they are no longer in love. Lust knows no boundaries of marriage or faithfulness. It is selfish, sinful and evil. A spirit of lust is an evil spirit that destroys lives, marriages, and the secure environment in which children are supposed to be able to safely trust in.

Lust has been romanticized in movies, literature, and music. Many young people are growing up thinking that lust and love are necessary ingredients of a good marriage. No wonder there are so many divorces and disillusioned people in our society!

David took the liberty to look lustfully upon a woman he could see from his vantage point on the rooftop. When he inquired concerning who she was and was told that she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite that should have ended the matter right there.

It wasn't the need for another wife in the life of David that caused him to inquire into who she was; it was the sin of lust in his heart as was evidenced by what happened next. David did the unthinkable, he sent his servants to go get her. David used his position of power being driven by lust and committed a sin that he knew full well was forbidden by every standard of behavior known to him. Uriah was a soldier out in a battlefield serving the wishes of his commander in chief while David is sinning with his wife! Bathsheba became pregnant and now David was about to be exposed. The whole ugly story is told in 2 Samuel chapter 11. The story goes on about how David tried to cover his sin by having Uriah return home to be with his wife, but how Uriah didn't go to his wife because he felt guilty about sleeping with his wife when the other soldiers were out on the battlefield deprived of such a privilege. This plot having failed, King David now had to devise another plot to cover his sin. The next sin to enter the heart of David was murder. David arranged for the death of Uriah in battle. After David heard that Uriah was dead, he took Bathsheba to be his wife.

David may have thought that he had successfully covered his sin, but God saw what happened and was displeased. It wasn't until Nathan the prophet was sent to David with a word from the Lord that David finally repented.

To David's credit, when he was confronted with his sin, he was able to humble himself and repent. David had stepped out from under the protective cover of God, and when the child was born it fell sick and died. No amount of prayer, even fasting and prayer could bring healing to the boy.

God is a forgiving God when we come to him with humility and call upon him, but the result of our sin is not as easily fixed. The scars that result from sinful living can last a lifetime, but grace covers a multitude of sin.

Not all sins are exposed to public view, yet God knows about every sin that is committed. David may have done similar sins before that went unreported, but God loved David enough not to allow it to continue.

Just because he was the King of Israel didn't give him license to sin. From past stories about the integrity of David, it is evident that he knew better. When David was finally confronted with his sin he did the right thing, he repented.

There are stories of otherwise godly men that have been deceived by Satan into believing that because there was an anointing upon their ministry that they had some kind of divine sanction permitting them to sin. Just because God doesn't immediately lift his presence and anointing does not mean that God has given sanction to sin. On the very face of it, the contradiction is evident! God is a holy God and cannot be tempted with sin; neither does he tempt any man.

David had come to realize that it was truly against God that he had sinned and therefore he wrote the psalm before us as his psalm of repentance.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

David begins by acknowledging his need for mercy from God, the sort of which springs from the unfailing love of the Almighty. David prayed that his sin would be blotted out and his iniquity washed away. David evidently lived with the knowledge of his sin heavy upon his conscience. He said that his sin was always before him. This is a truth that many people have lived their lives with, especially when they have committed adultery and a child has been conceived. Not all children conceived during a lustful fling die as a result of lifted divine protection or judgment, but the child is a constant reminder of the sin that brought it into this world. Whether David was reminded by the existence of the birth or just his tender conscience before God, I cannot say, but he knew in his heart of hearts that his sin was against God and really after all, only against God. Sometimes our sins don't seem to matter to anyone else, but no one has the kind of claim to us like God! David may have felt that as king he was above the law, and perhaps even the people of the nation thought he was, but God didn't excuse him.

Some people try to justify their sins by claiming that they were born with a propensity for a certain type of sin. David recognized that this was true, that he was sinful from the time not only of his birth but also from the time of his very conception! The homosexuals of our present time are claiming validation from the idea that they were born that way and therefore should not be held responsible for their conduct. I am quick to point out that, that is not a valid excuse because everyone is born with a propensity to one form of sin or another. Are we as a society going to excuse child molesters, rapists, serial killers, liars or thieves because they were born that way? It doesn't take a very smart person to recognize the folly of such thinking.

Those who minister in the deliverance ministries know that the very circumstances of a conception can have a profound bearing upon the sort of sins a child has to deal with. I know a person who was conceived into a home where the father was unfaithful and the mother was very upset with the pregnancy. The mother at times had said she stood at the sink with a knife in her hand contemplating taking her life. The child born was born with a deep sense of rejection that resulted from this rejection from the womb. It wasn't that the child once born was not loved and cared for but the spirit of rejection was there from the start and no amount of love could remove it. It also followed that there were some attempts at suicide in the life of the person. God's love and grace prevented success in these efforts and brought healing and restoration, but it serves to validate the word that says, "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children." The cure was deliverance from the evil spirits that had taken advantage of the circumstances of the conception

and finding an open door of lack of knowledge and repentance on the part of the parents, found access to the innocent child.

Not all propensities to sin are that directly connectable to the sin of the immediate parent. Even where conceptions take place that are in an atmosphere of love and devotion, children can have a propensity to sin that goes all the way back to the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden.

Sin must be recognized to be what it is; it is like a disease that must be dealt with. Sin has an origin; that origin is the heart of Satan. Satan is the tempter and when we are confronted with temptation, Satan is behind it in some way.

Repentance is the first step in any deliverance. Repentance that is effective is repentance that is toward God. It is in submitting ourselves to God with hearts of repentance that we are enabled by the Spirit's power to command Satan to flee. Once Satan has been dispensed with, then a deep repentance that deals with the very residue of sin must follow. James talks about the process in the book of James where he says,

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:7-10)

There is a condition in the heart of every individual that must be dealt with if we are to live consistently, godly lives. Not only do we need to have the guilt of a sin taken from us, but also we need the very condition of heart and mind that allows for such sin to be dealt with and healed.

The temptation that confronted David was through his eyes. David saw a woman whose beauty appealed to him. At this point it was temptation. How he handled the situation was going to determine the outcome. Did David see the face of the serpent in the situation? If he had of and called upon the Lord for strength he could have left the rooftop and push all thoughts of her away from himself, but he didn't. If he reasoned that seeing a woman is not the same as having sex with her, then the soil of his heart was already vulnerable to satanic suggestion. If when he looked out and saw her and realized that sin was knocking at his door and turned from it, nothing more would have come of it.

While preaching to prisoners at the prison where I am a volunteer pastor, I told the men that Satan comes in many forms to attack us; sometimes he comes in the heart of a woman. If we are to be an overcomer, we must be able to see, as God would have us see. There are so many situations where the face of the serpent is present. Any time you are confronted with the temptation to compromise your standards of righteous conduct, the face of the serpent is near.

If we want a pure heart changes must be made in our conduct, our thought life, and in what we allow into our hearts as affections, whether hidden or not. Changing isn't easy; we need help with the process.

⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.
¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

In every matter that has to do with eternal life there is a part that is ours and a part that is God's.

Many people are carrying sin in their heart that they do not recognize as sin. They have such things as hate, bitterness, unforgiveness, sadness, unhappiness, and a host of bad behaviors we might call distemper. By that I mean such things as irritability, meanness, and in general a warring spirit that colors all of life's actions and attitudes. We don't see these as sins because they are there because—and then we give a reason. The reasons are various and different to each person. It might be something someone said or did that we site as the reason for our present condition. I recognize that deeds done by others have a profound effect upon us, but what is now

present in our hearts is not what someone has done to us way back when, but rather the sin we allowed to invade our hearts because they did what they did.

As I write this I am overwhelmed with the reality of which I speak, because, so many people are so totally lost and miserable because they have such long standing conditions of heart that have so colored their personalities and thought processes that it almost seems impossible to undue the web that Satan has been permitted to weave in them.

Healing begins with recognition that there is a need for help, but too many people refuse to acknowledge their need because they are afraid that someone will think bad thoughts about them. There is one who never thinks bad thoughts about anyone; his name is Jesus! This is where weep, wail and mourn come into play. Go to him and let him help you open that chest where you put all that pain thinking that it was some sort of treasure that you felt justified your bad attitudes and bad behaviors. You have thought so long that you are the way you are because of what they did to you, but now you know it is because, in that moment of pain, you chose to not forgive. You closed the door of godly love and lost your joy in the process.

Oh, you might have gone out to have fun, but there was no peace with God or joy in your salvation. You may laugh and dance and sing, but if there is the sin of unforgiveness, your laughter will turn to sadness, and your fun to unhappiness until you finally come to the point where you can let Jesus heal you.

Let Jesus help you revisit your sinful heart and let all that emotion go in weeping and yes even wailing. Mourning is good when it is in the process of letting go of the past. What has been is not now, nor will it ever be again; let it go and begin to live in the liberty of resurrection life. What joy there is when the chest is emptied and the pain is no longer permitted to have power over you. Give it all up and drink freely of the water of salvation.

David had acknowledged his sinfulness and that it was against God primarily, after all, that he had sinned. Although he had sinned against a man and his wife, and that was a serious sin, it was the sin against God that mattered most to him. He acknowledged that in sinning against man he sinned against God. All sin is against God, because it is against his Spirit and nature. Good fellowship happens when sameness of spirit exists between two individuals. This is why even in sinful relationships there can be oneness of heart, both individuals liking the same sin. When one person wants to sin and the other doesn't conflict results. What should be done to correct a condition like that? God's way is for the sinner to repent. Men who love their sin want the righteous to become sinners too. Jesus called them blind leaders of the blind who both fall into the ditch.

David had endangered the fellowship that had been afforded him with the Holy Spirit. On the one hand David had a sin nature that had gotten out of control resulting in sin; but it was the fear of losing the presence of the Holy Spirit that drove him to repentance. David's love for God was greater than his love for his sin, therefore; he repented. David's part was repentance, God's part was forgiving, cleansing and restoration. David needed God's forgiveness and cleansing, but the sin had revealed that he needed even more; he needed a creative work, one that would give him what he obviously lacked, a pure heart and a steadfast spirit.

An acquired appetite for sin still drives many people who obviously love God with all their hearts. The sin nature is not native to mankind; it is the result of the fall. Cleansing from this sin requires a redemptive work of the Holy Spirit. Man's part in this process is to cast ourselves upon the mercy of God, repenting of the sins we have committed, and seeking release from the grip of sin that Satan has been able to get on us as a result of our sinful desires and attitudes.

The words of the Psalmist have been poured out to God from the mouth and heart of sinners of every generation that has followed. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Have you ever prayed that prayer? I have, I have wept it, sang it, prayed it and believed for it, because, only God can do such a work in us. I have prayed for the scrubbing with hyssop (the scouring pad of those days), and the washing of the word. One day Jesus told his disciples that they were clean by the words he had spoken. Soap and water clean the outer man,

but the blood of Jesus and the water of the word cleanse the inner man. Wonderful as it is, cleansing is still only part of the process.

Once cleansed, we must be filled with the Spirit of Life, the Holy Spirit. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that creates a pure heart in us. Without the Spirit of Life, we revert back to the old sin like a pig returns to its wallow. We can't help it; the sin nature must be dealt a deathblow that only God can deal, then and only then, can we live a victorious life in Jesus Christ. Our part in the process is to deem the old sin nature dead and to live after the Spirit, that is, to pursue godliness, righteousness and peace and to seek the daily infilling of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Chapter Fifty-three

A Godly Response to Evil Doers

Psalms 52

For the director of music. *A maskil* of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: "David has gone to the house of Ahimelech."

Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? ² Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. ³ You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. *Selah* ⁴ You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!

⁵ Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah* ⁶ The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, ⁷ "Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!"

⁸ But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. ⁹ I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.

While fleeing from the presence of King Saul, David went to Nob and sought provisions from the priest that was there with the tabernacle of the Lord. Ahimelech the priest told David that the only bread he had was the Bread of the Presence that had been before the Lord the day before. David accepted the bread and also was given the sword that had been the giant Goliath's that David had killed. He took the bread and the sword and left, but Doeg the Edomite was there and saw what took place. Doeg was King Saul's head shepherd. The story is told in 1 Samuel 21 and 22. Later when Saul heard about what had taken place and hearing the report of Doeg, Saul went to Nob and ordered the priests killed. No one would raise a sword against the priests of the Lord, however, so Saul ordered Doeg to kill them, which he did, and also all the inhabitants of the city including women and children. When David heard the story he wrote this Psalm 52.

With this story in mind it is easy to understand why David, being a righteous man, was so indignant toward Doeg. Not only had he been a deceitful talebearer, but also had himself raised his sword against the Lord's anointed. It's a serious matter to enter into touching God's anointed.

David couldn't see any future for Doeg outside of Divine judgment. The very idea that he would try to benefit himself with issues that had to do with the eternal plan of God was repugnant. Doeg went from shepherd to conqueror and no doubt gained handsomely from the

spoils of his wicked effort. What good is it if we gain the whole world and in the process lose our soul?

In the world of Christianity, men have been tempted to seize power over a church or institution by undercutting the leadership. If they are privy to some flaw, they use it to benefit their own desire to gain power over the church or institution. Love covers a multitude of sin, and just because a person knows something about someone that can be used against them, it doesn't justify using it. If people in leadership are practicing sin and someone knows about it, the Biblical thing to do is to go to the person and confront them with the knowledge of the sin. If they refuse to repent, then they should take the matter to those who are responsible to act upon such matters, if they refuse to act out of indifference or sinful attitudes, then the matter may be taken to the whole assembly. If the whole assembly refuses to act out of sinful attitudes or actions, then the person who is concerned with the matter should leave them to the judgment of God and go their separate way.

David wasn't in a position to act against Doeg, so he left him in the hands of a just God, who David was confident would do what needed to be done. As for David he saw himself as an olive tree flourishing in the house of God. David embraced the Lord in the knowledge of his unfailing love, and was comforted in his faith in the eternal plan of God.

Chapter Fifty-four

The Foolish Deny God

Psalms 53

For the director of music. According to *mahalath*. A *maskil* of David.

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good.

² God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. ³ Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

⁴ Will the evildoers never learn—those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on God? ⁵ There they were, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread. God scattered the bones of those who attacked you; you put them to shame, for God despised them.

⁶ Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

Does anyone understand the depth of depravity? If you want to know how vial evil can get visit a fool. That's what God calls people who deny his existence. God says they are corrupt and their ways are vial.

Just in case we think that we are better than they, the psalm goes on, "there is no one who does good not even one!" The depth of the corruption of the unregenerated human spirit is such that if one is allowed to act out of his fallen nature unrestrained, he is capable of indescribable evil. Because people have sin natures, laws are needed to govern them. The bulk of our legal system is designed to build boundaries to control the fallen natures of the people being governed. Without a sin nature, only superficial boundaries would be needed. The legal system would be

dedicated to defining righteousness instead of trying to define the nature of evil. As evil becomes more and more liberalized, more and more laws are needed to try to contain it.

Men in their foolishness try to improve society without God. They pick and choose the kinds of sins that they will approve, and condemn others thinking some evil is better than other evils, but then much to their dismay, unexpected complications appear to frustrate their efforts to improve society by allowing for the expressions of fallen natures.

An example of this is seen as our society began to popularize fornication and adultery around the beginning of the twentieth century. With the increase of sin, so came the increase of venereal disease and unwanted pregnancies. This led to the need for better contraception and knowledge of how to treat infections and diseases. As these proved to be inadequate due to the carelessness and abandon of sinful people, abortions were seen as an answer to the pregnancy problem, never mind that it involved the destruction of unborn human life. Then about the time that science was about to think that the diseases could somehow be contained, then aids appeared on the scene. Then another dilemma soon appeared, girls were having babies in secret and killing them or abandoning them in dumpsters. All at once the hypocrisy of our legal system began to be clearly seen as we came to understand that a woman could have her baby killed in the womb or in the process of birth, but if she waited until it was born, she was condemned as a murderer.

How vile is the fallen nature of mankind? Trying to control sin without God's answer is about as frustrating as trying to kill dandelions by cutting off the surface weed without digging up the root, it looks good for a while but the weed will be back bigger and stronger.

The hardness of hearts that is currently visible is evidence that sin is still very much alive in hearts that are unrepentant.

The psalmist said that such people dread when there is no need to dread. Our nation is going to great lengths today to defend us against enemies that are among us, but no one knows who they might be until they strike. There is a better way to defend ourselves against such enemies; it is to repent and seek God. When God is pleased with a nation or us as individuals, he will intervene in ways that prevent much of what would otherwise threaten us.

Chapter Fifty-five

Praise the Name of the Lord

Psalm 54

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A ¹*maskil* of David. When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, "Is not David hiding among us?"

Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. ²Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth.

³Strangers are attacking me; ruthless men seek my life—men without regard for God. *Selah*

⁴Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.

⁵Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them.

⁶I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you; I will praise your name, O LORD, for it is good. ⁷For he has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foe.

The Story of David is filled with struggles against enemies that were constantly in pursuit of him. As long as David was a shepherd in his father's fields no one pursued him or cared about

him, but once the anointing oil from Samuel the prophet was poured over him, he became a target of evildoers. His first enemies were his own brothers who misunderstood him, and then it was the Philistine giant Goliath. Afterward the jealousy of King Saul was aroused as the women gave greater acclaim to David than they did to King Saul. As wickedness grew in the heart of the king, so did the desire to murder this young man who had the anointing oil of God upon him.

As a result of the blessings of God having been lifted from King Saul's life, he became increasingly more evil, and was demonically tormented. David was a fine musician and Saul called for him to come and play music for him when his torment would become unbearable. This would calm the king, but it also provided an opportunity for Saul to try to kill David. Once the desire to murder David found residency in the heart of the king, David was no longer safe in his presence. David became a fugitive and in due time went to the region of Ziph. At the time that King Saul came to pursue David and his men, they were in the Desert of Maon in the Arabah south of Jeshimon. The men of Ziph had reported his presence in their area to the king so the king followed them to try to capture David. David repeatedly turned to the Lord for comfort and appealed to God for protection. Even Jonathon, the son of King Saul who should have inherited the kingship, came and encouraged David to trust in the Lord. Both Jonathon and King Saul knew that David was going to be the King, but Saul was determined to prevent it. It was the pressure of this condition that inspired David to write this Psalm.

It is a divine truth that spiritual growth emanates out of the most agonizing circumstances of life. Trouble is often the catalyst that causes us to reach for God. Not many people turn to God when all is going well in their lives, when they are experiencing success and have lots of friends and recognition. There are, however, those who experience a deep loneliness and lack of fulfillment causing them to ponder and search for greater meaning, but it usually takes adversity to cause them to turn to the Lord.

The roots of spiritual growth were going deep in the soul of David as adversity upon adversity followed him everywhere he went. I don't think David ever considered that his enemies were his friends in the deeper spiritual sense of understanding. It was true; nevertheless, that it was pressures like these that were the school of faith and character that David would draw from many times in his career as a king. David had no way of knowing in his conscious mind that one day Matthew would write in his opening line of his Gospel that Jesus was the son of David. This was a very special acknowledgement of the position that David was attaining in the heart of God.

David did triumph over his enemy, King Saul. Ultimately God was the one to take action against him. He was led into battle against the Philistines who were enabled by God to gain the upper hand. Many of the Israelites died in the battle along with the sons of Saul and Jonathon David's best friend. Finally an arrow from the Philistines wounded Saul, but not wanting to fall into their hands, he requested that his armor bearer kill him, when he refused Saul fell on his own sword and died.

Chapter Fifty-six

Cast your cares on the LORD

Psalm 55

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A ¹ *maskil* of David.

Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea;² hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught³ at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger.

⁴ My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. ⁵ Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. ⁶ I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest—⁷ I would flee far away and stay in the desert; *Selah* ⁸ I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."

⁹ Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city. ¹⁰ Day and night they prowl about on its walls; malice and abuse are within it. ¹¹ Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets.

¹² If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. ¹³ But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, ¹⁴ with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.

¹⁵ Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among them.

¹⁶ But I call to God, and the LORD saves me. ¹⁷ Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. ¹⁸ He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me. ¹⁹ God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them — *Selah* men who never change their ways and have no fear of God.

²⁰ My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. ²¹ His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords.

²² Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. ²³ But you, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days.

But as for me, I trust in you.

The great deceiver of mankind, that great archenemy Satan, sows his seeds of violence and lust into the hearts of all who are willing listeners to his lies. The spirit of war is prevalent in the world, but there is nothing new about that. From the beginning of life on earth after the fall, sin and death, violence and murder has been the constant companion of humanity. Like the mariner who strapped himself to the keel of his ship and had it sailed into the fury of a storm so he could experience first hand what the fury of a storm was like before painting a picture called *The Storm*, so God strapped David to the keel of life and took him into the fury of its storm so he could write Psalms that would express the desperation of souls in distress.

When the fury of the storm of life hit David, he wanted to flee somewhere, anywhere, where he could feel safe and be at peace again. David was a man of war and he must learn to live with danger and the constant threat of disaster. He was a type of Christ in that; Christ came to do warfare against the fallen nature of mankind. Saul was a type of the sin nature of mankind, or the flesh as it is called in the New Testament. David was a man after God's own heart, but the people of God were living in bondage and needed to be set free from the oppression of their enemies.

It's not the blatant evils that we face that are the greatest dangers because, we can set a defense against them, but it is the evils that catch us unaware that are our greatest dangers. The fallen nature within can be a subtly evil force that has the ability to lash out at the worst possible moments with insults and pain to those who deserve it the least.

David was a warrior who could take on great armies and with the help of the Lord bring them to certain defeat, but what perplexed him were his friends who walked with him saying all the right words, but who had murder in their hearts. Often rich and powerful people will attract those who are full of ambition and are seeking to advance a personal agenda of greed or are filled with a lust for power. These will stop at nothing when the opportunity to advance in some way is present. They can seem like friends and even believe themselves to be friends until the moment when a choice between loyalties to their friend collides with the need to advance their personal agenda. This selfishness can be cruel and cunning and brings great distress upon its victims. These were the sorts of people David had to deal with all his life.

David portrayed Christ who came to do battle against the enemies of the purposes of God. Just as David had enemies who presented themselves as friends because they sought advantages,

so people seek God for the same reasons. There is no greater ally for an evil nature that wants to become powerful or rich than to gain God as an ally. Before God and man can become real allies, this selfism must be exposed for what it is. God will never become the puppet of man or enter into a co-partnership with anyone. He is sovereign and Almighty God and it is only when men come to him abandoning their self-interests that he is able to begin a relationship with them. This is why repentance is a prerequisite to a relationship with God. The fallen nature that is full of opportunism must be dealt with before a pure heart of dedication to the purposes of God can emerge.

Children of God are always to be mindful that they are now new creations in Christ Jesus. As the scripture says, the old has gone and the new has come. We were once like the enemies of King David that went with him to the house of God with evil in their hearts, because, we went with wrong motives and sought God for personal gain rather than to find a place of fellowship with him that would result in acquiring a new heart and spirit that is pure and holy before God.

When our hearts are pure and our vision of things has changed, we see what we didn't see before, and we hear what we couldn't fathom before, and now we cast our care upon him because we now know that we can't bear our burdens alone.

Chapter Fifty-seven

When Enemies Pursue

Psalm 56

For the director of music. To the tune of "A Dove on Distant Oaks." Of David. A *miktam*. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.

¹Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. ² My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride.

³When I am afraid, I will trust in you. ⁴In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

⁵All day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to harm me. ⁶They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life.

⁷On no account let them escape; in your anger, O God, bring down the nations. ⁸Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll — are they not in your record?

⁹Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me. ¹⁰In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise— ¹¹in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

¹²I am under vows to you, O God; I will present my thank offerings to you. ¹³For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

Having lived in a land that honors law and order, it is sometimes rather shocking to read the accounts of people long ago who never knew when some aspiring young wannabe would come into their village and kill everyone and take their possessions and carry everything away. Sometimes it was only the men they would kill and then they would take all the women and children to be slaves. In the days of King David this was the way of life for the people of the region. Strong men would conquer areas and then provide protection to those they deemed to be

their friends. Before David became king he was one of these strong men who went about with a band of men raiding villages and killing all the inhabitants. Life was not very highly regarded in those days and these bands of men did what we would consider crimes today, but for them it was simply survival of the fittest.

When David went to Gath to live among the Philistines he was taking his life into his hands. The Philistines were the enemies of Israel and the King of Gath could have regarded David as a choice prize. If David ever needed divine protection it was while he was among the Philistines. David was a fugitive fleeing from Saul on the one hand but among historic enemies on the other hand.

Pressure makes faith in God grow strong. Here is a truism that we need to understand. If something doesn't have the power to hurt us, or even the power to destroy us, it lacks the power to cause us to grow. When David went to Gath he went in peace, but wicked men are always seeking opportunity take advantage of a situation. David must have lived with the awareness that at any moment someone might step out and try to kill him. It was this sort of fear that drove David to reaffirm his faith in God and to claim his protection, and thus gain some degree of peace.

It was David's faith in God that caused him to say, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Psalms 56:3-4)

David went on to say something that many people, especially in public life, have to deal with; he complained that people were twisting his words. Jesus advised us to speak clearly and mean what we say. He told us that our yes should mean yes and that no should mean no. This ends controversy. When people say yes while meaning maybe, they are always subject to being challenged. It may seem less controversial to be indecisive, but in the end, it causes more conflict than it avoids. People like to know where other people stand on important issues. Clear definitions end controversies even if there is disagreement. If we understand a point of view, we can choose to disagree and be peaceful about it. What frustrates men of truth is when people with evil intentions twist their words always trying to catch them in some kind of contradiction. This was the deadly game David was faced with. He was among the Philistines in peace, but there were those who suspected him of being disloyal to the king. If they could catch him in some word that would expose his alleged disloyalty, they could accuse him to the king and he would be killed.

Living in peace and freedom is a blessing beyond description. We in America, until recently, have taken peace and safety for granted. When we arise in the morning we expect to live out our day peacefully. When it doesn't turn out that way we are shocked and disturbed. We firmly believe that it is the right of every citizen to live in the comfort of knowing that he is safe from violent attack. Fear should be reserved for the unusual and should not be an everyday companion.

Normal fear should be nothing more than the knowledge that if you run your car into an object, damage will result or if you fall you might break a bone or bruise your body, this is normal fear and it is friendly fear. There are normal fears that are friendly fears and these are healthy and necessary to the well being of a person in life.

Irrational fear is a torment and is now considered to be a psychological disorder. It can also be a spiritual disorder indicating the presence of a demonic spirit that needs to be cast out. This can be done through the authority of the name of Jesus, but the maintenance of liberty is the result of proper spiritual relationship with Jesus and proper mental thought patterns. Deliverance and teaching should always go hand in hand. Many times proper teaching with an ongoing relationship with Jesus is all that is needed to gain victory over demonic torment.

The greatest remedy there is for irrational fear is to have a faith in God that is based on the knowledge that he is with us and is actively protecting us. I feel sorry for Christians who are constantly living in the fear of a demonic attack. They seem to think that they are under some

kind of attack if the weather is too cold or too hot, if they desire some pleasure and it is being denied, that it is Satan that is attacking them, how foolish; Satan has no power that we don't give him if we are Christians! God has given me peace and safety and they are not in Satan control. The only way Satan can gain power over my victory and peace is to con me into indulging in a fleshly appetite that is forbidden by the principles of the Holy Spirit. Repentance and a reaffirmation of my faith in Jesus is the prerequisite to renewed peace and victory in Christ.

Chapter Fifty-eight

Victory

Psalm 57

For the director of music. To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” Of David. A *miktam*.
When he had fled from Saul into the cave.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.

² I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. ³ He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; *Selah* God sends his love and his faithfulness.

⁴ I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts — men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.

⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

⁶ They spread a net for my feet — I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path — but they have fallen into it themselves. *Selah*

⁷ My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. ⁸ Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.

⁹ I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. ¹⁰ For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

¹¹ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

There is a place of total safety for the people of God. If you feel that danger is all about you draw close to the Lord, God is like a bird that puts its wings out to give shelter to its young, so he shelters us from whatever disaster we are facing.

There was a time in my life when I owed the government a great deal of money. I had experienced financial difficulty that left me owing the government some money that grew to enormous amounts because of penalties and interest. For quite some time I lived with this problem. I couldn't do anything about it business wise because it had created a problem for me that excluded me from doing what could have solved the problem in time, so I went to work doing whatever I could to take care of my family. There were many times that I was aware of the enormity of the potential problem and saw it as living under a huge mountain hanging out over me that could have easily destroyed me at any moment but at the same time seeing the hand of God preventing anything from touching me. Finally after learning how to live in peace knowing that God was ultimately in control. A way was provided for me to move out from under that disastrous danger.

The Psalmist said, "I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. What joy fills the heart, what worship when we triumph over our enemies! While King Saul was pursuing David, upon seeing a cave decided to go in and relieve himself not knowing that David and his men were crouching in the back of the cave. Afterward King Saul took a nap and while he was asleep David came and cut a piece of his garment off. David could have easily killed Saul right there and no one would have blamed him because he was being unjustly pursued.

David gained an impressive victory over his fallen nature that day, though he still felt guilty because he respected the holy anointing oil that had been poured over King Saul by Samuel the prophet. David had a very tender conscience before God, because he loved God and respected the holy things of God. Despite the violation of cutting the garment, still the greater victory had been won. He could have just as easily killed him, but he didn't! When David stepped out of the cave holding the piece of garment in his hand and calling to Saul, it was now evident to all what had just occurred. Saul was shame faced and realized what kindness David had shown him, he repentantly left and stopped his pursuit of David.

Everyone must deal with temptation at one time or another. Sometimes there is a moment of decision when we must decide what we will do. If there is no pull toward what is being offered, there is no temptation. Temptation only occurs when we desire what is being offered or opportunity is providing. How we handle the moment often determines the outcome. When we are strong in the Lord, temptation loses its power over us. Always what is our greatest desire wins in the end.

David was a man of war, and killing his enemy was as easy as falling asleep. This moment, however, was different. His enemy was the anointed of the Lord. What should he do? The appearance of the moment seemed that God had delivered Saul right into his hands. No one else need suffer only the guilty man, but he would have to touch God's anointed, so he settled for cutting his garment. This was no doubt a great victory, but only a man of deepest respect for the Lord's anointing, would notice the violation.

How good it is to win over temptation. There is no satisfaction to the fallen nature, but the spirit that is full of the Holy Spirit rejoices and is glad. The result in David was a desire to play and sing praises to the God who is above the heavens! David wanted to awaken the dawn, a new day of worship to the Lord. He wanted to praise God among the nations and to lift the name of the Lord before all to see.

David had called to the Lord in his hour of temptation, to deliver him from his enemy. He understood how deceitful and cunning his enemy was, but he totally believed in the intervention of his God. His faith triumphed over his fear and worship sprang forth from his heart!

God will deal with our enemies if we will take the step of faith and turn them over to the Lord to deal with. Some things take the Lord's dealings and we can't do what he must do. Leaving a matter at the foot of the cross and letting God deal with it takes faith especially when we see an opportunity to do something in our fallen nature to solve the problem, but also knowing that doing so is a violation of a known principle of the Spirit. Actions that are Spirit inspired are always fruitful, so when we know that an action is because we have been commissioned to act, there is peace in the performance of it. The result of Spirit inspired actions will result in praise to God.

Chapter Fifty-nine

The Righteous Will Win Over the Wicked!

Psalm 58

For the director of music. To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” Of David. A *miktam*.

¹Do you rulers indeed speak justly? Do you judge uprightly among men? ²No, in your heart you devise injustice, and your hands mete out violence on the earth. ³Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. ⁴Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears, ⁵that will not heed the tune of the charmer, however skillful the enchanter may be.

⁶Break the teeth in their mouths, O God; tear out, O LORD, the fangs of the lions! ⁷Let them vanish like water that flows away; when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted. ⁸Like a slug melting away as it moves along, like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun.

⁹Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns— whether they be green or dry—the wicked will be swept away. ¹⁰The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. ¹¹Then men will say, “Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth.”

Evil is in the heart of human beings from the time of their birth. When people in the homosexual community say that they were born that way, they are close to the truth. The truth is that sin is already resident in the heart at the very time of birth. Every person has an inclination to sin in one way or another. Actually the potential to commit the whole spectrum of sins is there, but sometimes one sin inclination is more dominant than others.

David was concerned about the inclination to lie that was so prevalent among his adversaries. We have the same problem today in the political world. A popular political party of our time has become known for its ability to lie and twist the truth. It almost seems that if a politician speaks the truth it would be a historic day. David felt the same way, as he had to deal with men of deceit. How refreshing it is to realize that there is one who will never lie to us, the Lord Christ Jesus.

At the time of my writing this chapter, the Israelis are fighting with the Palestinians over the use of terrorist bombers who are walking into areas of Israel and blowing themselves up killing and wounding people indiscriminately. The Palestinians say it is because the Israelis are oppressing them, but the Israelis claim their cause is a just one because the Palestinians lost the territory to Israel when the Palestinians attacked them. Since the Palestinians don't have an army to fight with, they have resorted to this tactic to defend their point of view. The methods they have been using against Israel are described in this Psalm, though that is probably not prophetic so much as coincidental. They have used deceit and violence to an art form. The Palestinian leader has negotiated and agreed to many things, and then has done the exact opposite. The result is that they have taken the world to the brink of war and unless God intervenes, war will certainly result.

The Psalmist used the picture of a cobra that can be charmed by a charmer, but says that his enemies can't be charmed or diverted from their deadly intent. He then uses other poetic language to make his appeal to God to destroy the wicked. There are some people who are so bent on evil that they have forfeited their right to life. Sometimes the justice of man is called upon to do what needs to be done, and at other times it is up to Almighty God to execute the justice needed.

God will deal with all forms of evil on the face of the earth on the Day of Judgment but for now God is mainly interested in the proclamation of his grace. He is offering clemency to all who will accept Jesus as the one and only sin offering that God will accept for sin. The gate of heaven stands open but only those who have allowed Jesus into their hearts by faith can enter. This

act of believing on him is like swearing allegiance to Jesus and renouncing Satan and all that he represents.

The final end of every contest between good and evil will be that good and righteousness will win. The wicked will ultimately be destroyed and peace on earth will be realized.

Chapter Sixty

How to Deal With The Slander of the Wicked

Psalm 59

For the director of music. To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” Of David. A *miktam*.
When Saul had sent men to watch David’s house in order to kill him.

¹Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. ²Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men.

³See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD. ⁴I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight! ⁵O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors. *Selah*

⁶They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. ⁷See what they spew from their mouths—they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, “Who can hear us?” ⁸But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations.

⁹O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, ¹⁰my loving God. God will go before me and will let me gloat over those who slander me. ¹¹But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In your might make them wander about, and bring them down. ¹²For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, ¹³consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob. *Selah*

¹⁴They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. ¹⁵They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. ¹⁶But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.

¹⁷O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

When we’ve done some evil and people are then set against us, at least we deserved it. But when we are innocent of all charges, it is difficult to accept what is happening to us. It is difficult to be peaceful about circumstances that have been trust upon us when it is totally unjust.

In doing prison ministry, I occasionally talk with someone who claims to be totally innocent of the crime they were charged with. It’s hard enough to do time for a crime committed, but when you’ve been framed or are the victim of an aggressive prosecutor, it is very difficult to forgive and let go of bitterness. Sometimes we must understand that there is a God who is taking note of all that is happening to us. If we were allowed to see the end that has been planned by God for those who will forgive despite the evils done to them and allowed to see the end for those who have done the evil, we would bear it joyfully.

The problem with humanity as a whole is that we tend to only look at the here and now. We live as though this life is all there is, and never fully comprehend that there really is a wonderful eternity to be enjoyed by those who go there. This life is full of injustices and is quite insignificant like a little speck on the great canvas of eternity. What is not insignificant is our

opportunity to go to the God of eternity and receive his love gift of Jesus and the salvation he has provided that we might enter into his joy forevermore.

What was happening to David troubled him, but he knew how to deal with it, he took it to the Lord in prayer. David took refuge in the knowledge that God always caused good to triumph over evil. The problem that many of us have is that we look only to the now part of the eternal dealings of God. Many people have become disillusioned when they have prayed earnestly about some matter and what they desired didn't come to pass as they wished.

Many people have prayed earnestly for a loved one to be healed only to have to say goodbye at a gravesite. If they have been taught that all people should be healed if prayer is offered for them, this can be a shattering experience to faith. If on the other hand they have been taught that healing is a gift from God given as he wills, and that when it is withheld it is always because he has something better in mind, then people can say goodbye to a departed loved one knowing that they are in a far better place, and that the healing has been given, only in an eternal way rather than temporal.

There are also evil people in the world that do not receive the benefits of salvation because they have rejected Jesus.

One day as I was driving to a meeting in Reno, Nevada, the Lord spoke a profound truth to me. It was evening time and the sun was getting to low in the sky. As I approached the city from the west I was looking down upon the city and what a beautiful sight it was! As I pondered the beauty my mind began to think of the lives of the people who were not in my view, but who I knew were in those buildings and on those streets. Some were in town to end a marriage; others were there in an effort to get rich quick. Some of the residents were there to exploit those who came.

As I pondered what I knew to be a contradictory picture, the Lord put a question into my mind, "What is evil?" Then without waiting for an answer he gave me the answer. Rejection of Jesus Christ is the worst possible evil. This was a startling realization to me because; I had always thought that the most evil people were some form of criminals. I knew it was important to accept Jesus as Savior, but to put a person as a worse criminal than a child pornographer or mass murderer never even entered my mind. Yet this is what the Lord was saying to me.

As I pondered this truth, I realized that, yes indeed it was because it cost God so much. To reject his gift is indeed the most evil thing a human being can do to God! This gift will cancel the record of all sins and crimes a human being can ever do. This gift is the key that opens the door of heaven and washes away every sin and cleanses every heart of those who accept him. Failure to accept this gift is an eternal sin because; there is no other way into heaven. Those who reject this gift can never find access to the father no matter what they call him.

David's view of God was somewhat unique in days of old as he saw God as a loving God, a God of unfailing love. David understood that God was protecting him from being destroyed by his enemies. When David arose in the morning, he had a song of praise upon his lips. When he wrote Psalms, he wrote about the greatness of the care of the Lord and how strong and faithful he is to those who love him. He also wrote about the judgment of God that was awaiting those who do evil. Only a foolish person would want to continue down a road of life that leads to destruction, but sadly many do choose just that.

Chapter Sixty-one

Where is God?

Psalm 60

For the director of music. To the tune of “The Lily of the Covenant.” A *miktam* of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

¹You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; you have been angry—now restore us! ²You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking. ³You have shown your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger. ⁴But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow. *Selah*

⁵Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered. ⁶God has spoken from his sanctuary: “In triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the Valley of Succoth. ⁷Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter. ⁸Moab is my washbasin, upon Edom I toss my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph.”

⁹Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? ¹⁰Is it not you, O God, you who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies? ¹¹Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. ¹²With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.

Sometimes it seems like God has turned his back on us and rejected us. Everything seems set against us, but is that really the case?

One day upon seeing some of the young men in my church going through very difficult trials, I asked the Lord, “why is it they are having to suffer so when they had not apparently done anything bad?” He replied, “It’s not that they are bad, but rather, that they are good.” Suffering and difficulties are not always punishment any more than clay in the hand of a potter when being kneaded is because the clay is bad. On the contrary, the potter selects the clay because it has the quality necessary to undergo the kneading process. All beautiful pots have undergone the kneading process before the molding and baking could take place. We are all clay pots, as it were, but some allow the potter to knead them and do whatever else is needed to extract all the impurities from their created state to be refined into a very delicate and beautiful pot.

I’m not sure why David was so troubled when this Psalm was written, evidently some battle had not gone well for Israel, but did that mean that God had forsaken them? There are times when it seems that God is not on our side, that everything is going wrong in our lives, but does some momentary event mean that God is not working his plan? Even when it seems that God is far away, he really is near after all.

There was a time in my life when I wasn’t seeing the Lord working in any visible way. I was going about the affairs of my life doing what seemed right to me at the time, and then one day the Lord spoke to me through a word of prophecy and told me that he had been nearby watching me, but that now he was going to begin to require changes. The prophecy described the inner struggle that had been going on. All the confusion that resulted from not being able to reconcile what I had been taught was right with what was actually the case in any given situation.

You know how it is, you pray, pray, and pray and still things remain the same. You pay your tithe and still struggle to make ends meet. It’s easy to conclude that God has forsaken us, but has he?

What I didn’t know was that God had a plan that involved bringing me into a position of heart and mind where he could give me instructions on a one on one basis. He wanted to cause me to see what I had never seen before, and experience his presence in ways I never thought possible. From that time onward he would allow me to experience circumstances that would create the right state of mind and heart to reveal a truth to me and have me understand its meaning from an experiential basis.

It's one thing to know something as a truth taught, and quite another to have a truth taught bringing a result in our lives. When a truth taught connects to an experience, the next time it is needed we can apply it with confidence. This is what God desires of us, learn the lesson and move on. Having to repeat a lesson over and over gets tiring, as was the case with the nation of Israel after God delivered them out of Egypt. They failed to understand that the God who could part the sea could also give that food to eat in the desert and water to drink out of a rock. Just because something seems impossible to us does not mean it is impossible. What seems impossible to man is always possible to God.

What God desires is for us to draw encouragement from past interventions and allow our faith to reach for new ways that God is working in our lives. God has many new ways to reveal his love beyond parting a sea. Giving manna in the wilderness was unheard of until it happened to them! Isn't it exciting to be a part of a new thing that God is doing? Yet it is my experience that if something doesn't look familiar based on the past or what we have been taught ought to happen, many will return to the familiar.

When Jesus called his disciples to get up early one morning and go pray with him on a mountain, for some I would guess, it was easier to say, "Go ahead, Jesus, we'll catch up to you later." They were accustomed to Jesus getting up early for prayer, but should they do the same? I don't actually know if any of the other disciples were invited to go up the mountain of transfiguration other than the ones who went, but since God is no respecter of persons, it is my guess that he invited all of them, but only Peter, James and John went. Who would have ever imagined that he was going to be transfigured before them? I feel very sure that even Peter, James and John thought this was just another prayer time for Jesus.

It is my experience that God seldom warns us about something he is about to do. He likes to show up suddenly into our experiences! I think God enjoys surprising us with special blessings. We are creatures of routines, but routines lead to boredom, and boredom leads to complacency. When God surprises us with some new blessing, it brings a new awareness that he is there with us. Even miracles can become boring if they are always happening. Miracles are intended to be reminders of the omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence of our God of unfailing love. God is always with us, but hiding himself from our immediate consciousness keeps us from taking him for granted.

Whatever David was going through that made it seem that God had forsaken him was not the reality. God was always right there, but allowing the circumstance set the stage for greater revelations of who he is, that were yet to come. Also as a side note, this Psalm would not have been written in its present form had it not been for what he was experiencing!

What am I saying? Just this, when you are experiencing unusual circumstances allow them to alert you to look for God's hand to be revealed! This is what David did, he reaffirmed that the armies of man are worthless so he looked for divine intervention.

Chapter Sixty-two

The Heritage of the Believer

Psalm 61

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Of David.

¹ Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.

² From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. ³ For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.

⁴ I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings. *Selah* ⁵ For you have heard my vows, O God; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

⁶ Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations. ⁷ May he be enthroned in God's presence forever; appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him.

⁸ Then will I ever sing praise to your name and fulfill my vows day after day.

The mark of a pure man of God is that he lives in the now with eternity in view. This life can be a wearying journey, but when we look up and see God's face smiling upon us, we take courage. The Lord is the wellspring of life and hope. Those who look to him will live forever.

There is a heritage that is more than a transitory heritage; it is an eternal heritage. In fact, it isn't until we begin to see that every blessing that we receive from God is only a trickle down of the real blessing that is to come, that life begins to make sense. Many people live as though God must perform for them in the here and now, or else, God has failed to keep his word. That is, of course, a very narrow view of God.

When we come to the Lord and receive salvation, what we get primarily is the assurance that God has laid up a treasure in heaven for us. This treasure is more than our feeble minds can fully comprehend, so we often live as though it really doesn't exist after all. Life is such that we tend to look upon everything with a force that unless certain things happen we're done for. We assign importance to such things as careers, advancements, relationships, etc., as though the purpose for our life can only be met if we have these things.

I like to refer to salvation as a package, like a gift-wrapped box that is filled with very special goodies. This box God gives us doesn't have the actual articles in it, but is filled with notes, love notes if you will, telling us about all that he has for us eternally. There are notes in there about eternal life, peace with God, unbroken fellowship with the Lord forever and ever, absolute health, strength and total fulfillment of every kind of pure desires anyone could ever have. There is far more than we could ask or think, so what do we get now?

What we get is the earnest of the inheritance, as the King James Version of the Bible says, that is the down payment portion or putting it in banking terms, a draw upon what is laid up for us. Jesus made a deposit in our account when he died in our stead on the cross, and when we have a special need; we go to the Lord and ask for an advance on our inheritance.

Don't worry, you can't use up the inheritance, the only part that can be diminished is the parts that are given for special service. Jesus warned us about collecting our rewards on earth for special service telling us it is better to keep those special things we do for Jesus or some person in need to ourselves so that he can reward us in heaven.

Some people struggle with the reality that there often are what seem to be unanswered prayers. We know that there are some prayers that are disqualified from answers because, they are prayers that originate in the fallen nature, and are selfish and sometimes sinful prayers. God will not listen to such prayers, and may order some form of correction that may be appropriate. James talks about this condition in the Book of James, and tells us that we don't get what we ask for because, we want to consume these things upon our sinful natures.

There are, however, prayers that are appropriate to ask God for, healing, protection from dangers, special provisions that are needed, and yes, even some special delights along the road of life. What we need to understand, however, is that what God actually gives us is subject to his will for us at any given time. Sometimes God withholds certain legitimate blessings because, he has something in mind for us that granting it at the time of the request would interfere with what he has in his plans. When we see that all blessings are a part of a package that has promises that pertain to eternal conditions, and that what we get is a foretaste of what is to come, we see that God is not obligated to give us anything in the present life, but give them he does! My concept of God is that since he is a God of Love, he delights in pouring his blessings upon us, if we can just

receive them. Every blessing we get in the present is only a taste of what is yet to come. Jesus invited us to ask that our joy might be full!

David suffered the stress of constant danger. He never knew when someone might be waiting in ambush hoping to do him in, but David's way of dealing with it was to go to the Lord and seek his help. He found God to be his strong tower, his sheltering rock, his tent of refuge, and he was comforted by that knowledge. He desired long life, but also more than this present life would allow. He wanted the eternal prize as well. Sometimes God has to withhold some of the present blessings he would like to give us because, we have a tendency to loose the focus of our relationship with him. It is a human thing to get so caught up in the goodies of life that we forget about who is giving them.

Sixty-three

My Rock and My Salvation

Psalm 62

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

¹ My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. ² He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

³ How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down—this leaning wall, this tottering fence? ⁴ They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse. *Selah*

⁵ Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. ⁶ He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. ⁷ My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. ⁸ Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. *Selah*

⁹ Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath. ¹⁰ Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

¹¹ One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, ¹² and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

What is the truth about man? Some people seem to be in such a high position of power that no one can be a threat to them. David's view of himself, however, was very different from the way other people saw him. He refers to himself as a leaning wall, a tottering fence! No wonder David sought the Lord so fervently. Many people who enjoy a certain respect within the realm of their endeavors have a very different view of themselves than others do. We tend to not take ourselves very seriously.

Everyone, it seems, wants to be the person at the top. Have you ever thought about some famous person and wondered what it would be like being them? I doubt that David ever once thought that his name would be remembered thousands of years later as he lived out his daily life. Have you ever wondered if someday people would be remembering you and analyzing everything you did and said? Is what you are doing today worth remembering or is it just another day on the eternal clock. If we are to make a difference in the history of humanity, we must leave the mundane activities of everyday life and get involved in something that has an eternal influence.

Man without God equals nothing at all, nothing that is of value. There are some individuals in history that are remembered because of their evil deeds. Acts of evil may gain people notoriety

but it won't gain them a place in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is better by far to be a virtual nobody and be in the kingdom of Jesus, than to be somebody in history and end up in hell forever and ever. Be who God wants you to be every day, and let historians decide if you did anything of value.

David has a word of instruction for his readers, "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. *Selah*" (Psalms 62:8) To whom do you pour out your heart—your best friend, your spouse, or some therapist? David's advice is to pour out your heart to the Lord. You can say whatever is on your heart without fear of being misunderstood, judged or looked down upon! The relationship we have with God is so intimate, so loving, so trusting, and so pure that we are always safe with him. Jesus called us friends. When I was young we used to sing, "Friendship with Jesus, oh what joy divine."

There aren't too many people that we can trust to tell just anything to. We often fear that they will misunderstand, or judge us, but if we know God, we know we can always trust him. If we need counsel he will counsel us. If we need correction he will give it, but misunderstand us? Never. Nor will he ever look down upon us for something we disclose to him. In fact, God holds us in highest esteem when we are being the most honest with him! It isn't until we trust him enough to be totally honest that he can help us.

God already knows everything there is to know about us, but it is important to us to be able to talk openly and honestly to God. If we are trying to hide from God, chances are we are being dishonest with ourselves. It has been said that liars often believe their own lies. It is Satan's business to try to convince us that a lie is the truth.

There is a great lie that Satan has been working long and hard to convince humanity is the truth after all. The lie is that God is not who we have been told he is in the Holy Bible. He wants to subvert our concept of God by calling him by a different name, or by exalting some other book or teachings that have an appearance of wisdom or validity. Whatever form it has to take to get us away from the Bible is okay with him. Anything but believing in Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. Salvation only comes by believing in Jesus and Satan works every angle he can to keep as many people from Jesus as is possible.

David began this Psalm 62 with these words; "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. Then he ends it with these words; "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done."

Chapter Sixty-four

Memorializing What God has Done

Psalm 63

A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

¹ O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. ³ Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. ⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. ⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

⁶ On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. ⁷ Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. ⁸ My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

⁹ They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. ¹⁰ They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.

¹¹ But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

Oh how we need the Lord to fill our hearts with his love and to enable us with the power of his Holy Spirit. Every encounter we have with the Lord deepens our relationship with him. Each provision he makes for us strengthens our faith in him. We do well to remember each time we have been touched by the presence of God.

When the Israelite nation crossed the Jordan River, they were instructed to take stones from the middle of the riverbed and carry them to the shore, and to take stones from the shore and carry them to the middle of the riverbed and to build memorials out of them. This was so they would remember what had happened here. Remembering seemed to be a problem in their already short history. When challenged with a new need or when facing a problem that was beyond them, they seemed to forget the events of divine intervention that had already occurred.

Sometimes I hear preachers engaging in a sort of spiritual cheerleading because, people seemed to need to be reminded of the events that have already past to encourage faith to believe for the present need to be met. I am sure that the Lord doesn't need the rah-rah-rah treatment to get him to act, but I know we do sometimes. I heard a preacher preaching that people need to write down the events when God has done something that is an answer to prayer.

Memorializing is a good practice, one that if I had personally done in my life, would be a very long read. I have many memories of divine intervention, flashes of revelation, and divine nudges that have directed my life and protected me from disastrous outcomes in life. The Lord has taught me many lessons along the road of life, more than I am able to recall, and at the time I didn't think that I would ever forget them, but the ability to recall fades, nevertheless, I must say, that every teaching that has come from him makes up the very thought process from which I constantly draw.

All of the encounters we have with the Lord make up our concept of God. Some of the elements in this pool of knowledge come from our study of the word of God and some from the everyday experiences we have with him. Our concept of God is vital to our spiritual character. If we see God in some inappropriate light we will see a distorted view of God. This distorted concept will lead us to either believe inappropriately, or to fail to believe when we have a need. Having a true and accurate concept of God is vital to our spiritual and psychological well-being, and indeed our very personality is formed by our concept of God.

When people are in the presence of the Lord and are worshipping, true worship is the result of experiences. People who have walked with the Lord and experienced provisions and interventions have a depth of love based on experiential knowledge that resonates when they worship. The longer a person walks close to the Lord the stronger their faith grows. Satan knows all about this so he tries his best to confuse the issues. Young Christians are vulnerable to attacks upon their faith because they lack the confidence that comes from experience. Initially the most important ingredient is the knowledge of the Word in our lives. As time goes on the scripture promises are strengthened by what we experience. Wise preachers rightly apply the word of the Lord so that young Christians don't have to learn what is appropriate and what is not through trial and error alone. Unwise teachers can either hinder true faith or inspire a hyper-faith that leads to confusion. Rightly dividing the Word of the Lord understands the appropriate application of truth. The more accurately truth is applied, the more satisfactory our life with Christ becomes.

The Psalmist declared "I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands." (Psalms 63:2-4) At whatever time this Psalm was written, I feel sure that enough divine interventions had happened to fill the heart of David with

awesome feelings regarding the love and care of God causing such words to flow from his pen. Words such as these don't come easily; they are birthed in the experiences of life.

When we memorialize the blessings of God and dwell upon them in our quiet time, we take courage to believe for whatever needs or challenges we currently face. After talking about the greatness of God, David then says, "They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals. (Psalms 63:9-10)

One day when the Apostle Paul had just been shipwrecked and was now safely on land, some brothers came to him from nearby and fellowshiped with him, and Paul took courage and continued his journey to Rome. It's easy to become overwhelmed by circumstances when you're wet and cold and feel all alone, even the knowledge that the Lord is near can at times use some physical confirmation. Paul was experiencing miraculous confirmations, but as he continued his journey and found some brothers and then was met by some who had traveled just to meet him, he was encouraged and continued his journey. (Acts 28) What an encouragement can come from just seeing a fellow traveler on this road to heaven's shore!

We cannot say enough about the importance of spending time recounting the wonderful events we have experienced on our journey. Equally, it is well to forget some of the pains that have been foisted upon us by careless and unrighteous fellow travelers. Dwelling upon the faithfulness of God encourages us, but dwelling upon the unfaithfulness of those who are still living in their fallen natures, discourages us. If you start to dwell upon the negative, you will be pulled into the valley of sorrows, but if you dwell upon the glory of God you can leave those who mean you harm to the care of God, and take courage and continue on with joy and peace being the rich food provided by the Spirit for us to feast upon. We can then burst forth in song and praise and glorify the Lord.

Chapter Sixty-five

God Takes Up the Cause of the Righteous

Psalm 64

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ Hear me, O God, as I voice my complaint; protect my life from the threat of the enemy. ² Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked, from that noisy crowd of evildoers.

³ They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows. ⁴ They shoot from ambush at the innocent man; they shoot at him suddenly, without fear.

⁵ They encourage each other in evil plans, they talk about hiding their snares; they say, "Who will see them?" ⁶ They plot injustice and say, "We have devised a perfect plan!" Surely the mind and heart of man are cunning.

⁷ But God will shoot them with arrows; suddenly they will be struck down. ⁸ He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn.

⁹ All mankind will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done. ¹⁰ Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him; let all the upright in heart praise him!

When David came to God with a complaint, it wasn't complaining. I suppose we could say he was merely pointing out that he was under attack and needed God's help. His complaint wasn't against God who he loved and trusted; it was against those who were rising up against

him. David was coming to God for shelter and encouragement knowing that when God fights for the righteous those with evil intent will soon come to a bitter end.

As I write this passage, the nation of Israel is surrounded by Islamic Arab nations who with one voice and heart are plotting the overthrow of Israel. This Psalm is as up to date as if it were being written today. These nations encourage one another with their evil plans, but God is against them.

I reflect upon the story of Joseph who was sold by his brothers into Egypt, and later became the second in power in the nation. When the brothers were in dire need due to conditions in Israel, they went to Egypt for help. What they didn't know was that this very Joseph that they had rejected was now second in power, and that they would now be turning to the very one they had so cruelly rejected so many years before.

The parallel condition is that Israel rejected Jesus and the Christian outcome of his sacrificial death, and therefore, he has been in the hearts of a Gentile Church for all these many years. Now in Israel's time of need it is to Joseph in the Gentile world to whom they come seeking help. His name is not Joseph now but as I write it is George Bush. As time passes it may be another name, but no matter, it is really the very church that proclaims Jesus that is in this Gentile nation that is the hope of Israel. Take the church of Jesus Christ out of the United States of America, and we would align ourselves with the enemy in a heartbeat. Why, because without Jesus to counter the wicked influence of the satanic spirit, hatred of Israel would flourish even in this nation.

The only reason the United States is aligned with Israel is because our government has been founded upon the Bible. The Bible teaches that those who bless Israel will be blessed and our forefathers embraced this truth and have supported the cause of Israel. We support Israel because we believe that it is the just thing to do, even though, if it were any other group of people we would condemn them as being an aggressor nation. We support them even though some of the very people that are displaced are themselves Christians. This is a dilemma that would be irrational if it were not for our understanding of the scriptures. The day will come when Israel will be awakened to the truth that it is Jesus to whom they are turning; the one they pierced has become their very hope of survival.

Will Israel repent and turn to Jesus? Oh, yes, indeed they will and when they do, he will come to them with arms of forgiveness wide open, and he will embrace them, and weep with them for he has longed to show them grace and mercy all these many years. Jesus didn't reject Israel; no, they rejected him! He was exiled, but they will bring him back with singing and rejoicing.

Chapter Sixth-six

Abundant Provisions

Psalm 65

For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

¹ Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. ² O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come. ³ When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. ⁴ Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

⁵ You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, ⁶ who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with

strength,⁷ who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.⁸ Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy.

⁹ You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. ¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops.

¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. ¹² The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. ¹³ The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.

Worship is a love feast! It is people expressing love to God and God loving us back. Praise is like some kind of magic, a symphony, setting the stage for wonderful and good communication. If you are going to say something that could be misunderstood, always start by talking about everything that is right! There is something disarming about a sincere compliment. Even God likes a good slap on the back as it were. “God, you are really doing good, I deeply appreciate all the bountiful provisions, the times when you have been there in my life protecting me, guiding me, teaching me, and doing wonderful manifestations of your unfailing love. Nevertheless, I have this concern today, so and so needs your healing touch, and brother so and so needs guidance in getting a better job,” or whatever it is that we wish to come to the Lord with. Recalling the fact that God is already working in the arena of our lives is not only good communication with God, but also more importantly, it reminds us to recognize his continual involvement in our lives.

One important form of worship is the fulfillment of our vows to God. If we say that we will serve him faithfully and then strike out to do our own thing, we are being unfaithful to our vow. The sin of self-determination is a serious sin. It is the sin that got Eve into trouble with God. She had been warned not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but the idea of being like God knowing good and evil was appealing to her so she did what she wanted to do and the result was that sin entered the human family.

Some people today are flirting with the idea that they are some kind of god, a very dangerous concept. Whether this could be somehow justified by a few isolated scriptures or not, is not the issue here as much as the heart that even want such a thing. God created us to be human beings and although he created us in his image, he did not assign us godhood. Godhood implies the ability to go your own way and do your own thing, a sort of independence. Jesus taught us that he is the one who has life in himself, and that we are to come to him that we might have life. If we were gods, as some people suppose, then why would we need Jesus? I guess the problem is that some people want to be something more than a created being that has a deep need, first to redeemed; and then to acknowledge that we are to remain branches on the vine Christ Jesus. The desire to be a god comes from a desire to attain a status of mind and heart of power and prestige, a pride child as it were.

I am very content to be what God made me to be, a man. I have no desire to be a god in any class or subtle meaning of the word. It was the desire to be as God that caused Satan to fall and some people are being seduced into the same mindset and are being setup unwittingly for a fall into the pit of pride.

There are two arenas of thought regarding godhood. One characteristic that makes God, God, is that he is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He also has life within himself, something no created being has. The other is the ability to act and be totally independent of any supportive system whatsoever. Anyone with brain one knows that certainly is not man. The very notion is contrary to everything that Jesus and the apostles taught us about ourselves and our need for Jesus. There is a concept of godhood that we can enter into, but to do so is to wind up in the same hell that Satan and all the fallen angels are in. God is god to us when we make him our God. Equally, if we choose to make ourselves god, then we are gods, however not in God’s class, but doing so requires rebellion against the Lord God. We cannot serve two masters. Either we

are going to be god and do our own thing or God will be our God and we will seek to do his will, serve his kingdom, and draw upon his life and power.

I am a child of God, but that is a different concept. God is my father, and therefore, I have a unique relationship with him. This does not make me a god, but it does give me access to the development of certain god like qualities. God is love and when I am properly connected to him I have love. I am a vessel into which he pours his Spirit and his Spirit brings all the character traits into my being that belong to my Father. His Holy Spirit is at work in me creating me into the very image of Jesus. His Holy Spirit is also in me to minister through me to the needs of others around me. There is a vast difference between being in the image of God and being a god. There are two possible ways we can use misuse the concept of our potential godhood, one is to be an independent being that tries to act in its own power as the supreme God does, and the other is to be a being acting in independence of the true and living God.

The terrible mistake that Satan made was to try to be independent of God. This led him into a breach of fellowship and a loss of the life-giving flow of divine energy that was sustaining his wonderful qualities.

Every God-like quality that man is capable of possessing come to him as an impartation from God. These qualities are not self-sustaining, however; but rather need constant sustenance and renewal. I like to picture man as being like a glove that is capable of great works, but only if the hand of the wearer is a skilled workman. God is a skilled workman and he puts his mighty hand into us and does works with us that are sometimes unfathomable. Those looking on may only see the glove but the glove doesn't do the work, it is God who is wearing the glove that does the work.

When Jesus spoke of his works he told us that it was the Father in him that was doing the work. Why? Because he was acting in the role of a human while on earth and as such had laid aside much of his Godhood so that he could demonstrate the proper role and relationship of the human and the divine.

Anyone who aspires to be a miracle worker is well advised to act only by the direct commission of the Holy Spirit, and that he is firmly connected both to the concept of—"thy kingdom come and thy will be done". We are to be kingdom builders while here on earth, but the kingdom we are to build is not our kingdom, but rather his kingdom.

The Psalmist got it right when he said, "Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple."

(Psalms 65:1-4)

We are called to dwell in the shadow of the Almighty, and to be ministered too by his Spirit so that in matters of character it can be said of us, as is our Father so are we. This is a creative work that the Spirit accomplishes in us, and it is good.

When we are in proper relationship to God, knowing that he is God and we are his dear children, we then begin to experience provisions and blessings that are reserved for the people who are walking in the good pleasure of our Father in Heaven. The Psalmist went on to express how God fills the streams with water, and makes sure that after the farmer plows and sows the crops there is water to irrigated them. Bountiful harvests occur when God is pleased with a people. When man begins to act arrogantly and independently trusting in his own spiritual development, droughts and all sorts of devastations follow. This is true of nations or individuals, because true divine blessing is the smile of God's approval upon people.

Sixty-seven

Remember and Believe

Psalm 66

For the director of music. A song. A psalm.

¹ Shout with joy to God, all the earth! ² Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! ³ Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. ⁴ All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name.” *Selah*

⁵ Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man’s behalf! ⁶ He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—come, let us rejoice in him. ⁷ He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations—let not the rebellious rise up against him. *Selah*

⁸ Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; ⁹ he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. ¹⁰ For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. ¹¹ You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. ¹² You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

¹³ I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you—¹⁴ vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. ¹⁵ I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats. *Selah*

¹⁶ Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. ¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. ¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; ¹⁹ but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. ²⁰ Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

God is worthy of our highest praises because he has forgiven our sins and not held our transgressions against us. He listens to our prayers and answers with an outpouring of his love.

The Psalmist is full of worship to God because he has answered his prayers. The nation had undergone difficulties, trying times, testing times, that had tested the very fiber of their faith, but the result was that like the fire purges silver, so their faith had been purified as they put their trust in God. God had preserved their lives and kept their feet from slipping.

As you pass through the hard and trying time of life, how do you react? When people do you wrong, do you want to get even with them. Every circumstance that has the power to drag us into despair also has within it the power to cause us to reach for the Lord; therefore, it has the power to bring growth. The decision is ours, will we succumb to the temptation to become bitter, enraged, hateful or vengeful or will we choose life, joy and peace knowing that God is still our source of all that we truly need? When we reject all the negative feelings and choose to love, then when we pray the Lord will hear our prayer.

There are two kinds of sins, action sins and reaction sins and God approves neither. In either case, it is sin in our hearts that is the problem. We sin when we are led astray by our lustful and sinful desires, or we sin in our hearts against someone when our comfort zone is damaged in some way by the actions of another.

Keeping our focus upon the goodness of God is vital to our faith. If we look at the greatness of our problems it’s easy to forget that solutions are just a prayer away! For the nation of Israel to remember such wonderful occasions of divine intervention as the parting of the sea, was always a source of encouragement. For those of us who have never experienced a parting of the sea, as it were, but have experienced many times of need when the Lord was there for us, remembering gives us courage to believe once more.

A preacher I heard recently was talking about the need to memorialize what God is doing in our lives. It’s not a new concept; actually it is as old as the Bible itself. Writing down

what God is doing tends to preserve it in our memories. He recommended this activity so that when we are tempted to succumb to Satan's fiery darts of doubt and fear, we can hold up the paper on which we recorded the victories and remind Satan of his doom. My faith is not in the history of past victories, it is in the Lord Jesus Christ through whom I have access to my Father in Heaven. My faith is wrapped in the knowledge of his love for me, and the many times he has been there giving me grace, forgiveness, and strength to carry on.

Chapter Sixty-eight

Praising God for Blessings

Psalm 67

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, *Selah* ² that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. ⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. *Selah* ⁵ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.

⁶ Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. ⁷ God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

The day is coming when all the world will see the true glory of the Lord. They will stand in total awe and wonderment at his mighty power and his tender love. How is it that one so mighty is yet so tender? Salvation is given to all who will receive it without regard to the ugliness of their sins. It is beyond natural man to forgive some sins. They are just too heinous, too violent or too vulgar, yet God, who sees all and knows the depth of our sins, forgives on the basis of simple faith in the sacrifice of Jesus. Such grace is beyond us, but God is not a man that he should lie.

God never asks us to justify our sins, or to make excuses for our bad behavior. If he did, no one would ever find forgiveness. Most people, if not all, sin having justified the act in their own minds. The scriptures declare that every way of a man is right in his own eyes. Even when some people readily confess their sinfulness, they still believe in their heart of hearts that they were justified in sinning for one reason or another. We are invited to come to Jesus with all the load of sin and reasons and forsake them, and believe in him because no matter how justified we feel about our sins, they still are sins and we cannot enter the gates of heaven with them.

People sin when a reason to sin seems like it makes sinning all right. Truth is, we sin because it is what we wanted to do all along, but some restraint in our life prevented us from doing it. If an event comes along that seems like it nullifies the restraint, we feel free to sin. It is at this point when the restraint is gone that self-examination determines the course of action. We must decide do we want to sin even if we think we are justified in doing so? If we have had a revelation of the glory of the Lord and have a desire to please him, we will want to turn from the temptation to sin and seek his strength to do so. Keeping praise to the Lord ever before us is helpful in resisting the temptation to become careless and indifferent.

There is no greater restraint than love. Love is a powerful deterrent to temptation. If you are married and want to keep the affections of your spouse for you alive, don't demand love; give love. The more you give pure love; the more love comes back. Some people think that love is

clinging to someone; on the contrary, love is best expressed in freedom. Law demands actions, but seldom inspires love. Grace is endearing and leads to a richer relationship. The more two people forgive each other, the closer the bond of love becomes. Jesus said that those who are forgiven much love much. Grace given inspires praise; therefore, God gives abundant grace that he might receive love and dedication back. The same happens to us when we are loving and gracious to each other. If we love to get, however, pain awaits us.

Pure love is a love that demands nothing in return but rejoices in every good gift given in return. When man and God are expressing love, a harvest of righteousness is coming and blessings beyond measure. When we give to God out of a heart of love and gratitude his heart is open to us, just as our heart of love is opened to God when he gives us unexpected blessings.

Chapter Sixty-nine

May God arise, may his enemies be scattered

Psalm 68

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. A song.

¹ May God arise, may his enemies be scattered; may his foes flee before him. ² As smoke is blown away by the wind, may you blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God. ³ But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

⁴ Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds—his name is the LORD—and rejoice before him. ⁵ A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. ⁶ God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

⁷ When you went out before your people, O God, when you marched through the wasteland, *Selah* ⁸ the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. ⁹ You gave abundant showers, O God; you refreshed your weary inheritance. ¹⁰ Your people settled in it, and from your bounty, O God, you provided for the poor.

¹¹ The Lord announced the word, and great was the company of those who proclaimed it: ¹² “Kings and armies flee in haste; in the camps men divide the plunder. ¹³ Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold.” ¹⁴ When the Almighty scattered the kings in the land, it was like snow fallen on Zalmon. ¹⁵ The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains; rugged are the mountains of Bashan.

¹⁶ Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the LORD himself will dwell forever? ¹⁷ The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. ¹⁸ When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious—that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

¹⁹ Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. *Selah* ²⁰ Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.

²¹ Surely God will crush the heads of his enemies, the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins. ²² The Lord says, “I will bring them from Bashan; I will bring them from the depths of the sea, ²³ that you may plunge your feet in the blood of your foes, while the tongues of your dogs have their share.”

²⁴ Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary.

²⁵ In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines. ²⁶ Praise God in the great congregation; praise the LORD in the assembly of Israel. ²⁷ There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them, there the great throng of Judah’s princes, and there the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali.

²⁸ Summon your power, O God; show us your strength, O God, as you have done before. ²⁹ Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts. ³⁰ Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls

among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver. Scatter the nations who delight in war. ³¹ Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God.

³² Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, *Selah* ³³ to him who rides the ancient skies above, who thunders with mighty voice. ³⁴ Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. ³⁵ You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people.

Praise be to God!

Some believe that Psalms Sixty-eight was written when David was preparing to return the Ark to the place prepared for it in the nation of Israel. The Philistine army had captured it when God's judgment was upon the house of Saul. The Philistines had returned it to Israel on a cart with a cow pulling it that had just had a calf. This was to prove that God was indeed the God of Israel because cows don't by nature leave their newborn calf and run to a different location without being driven. Now after several incidences and some mishandling of the Ark, David was bringing it to the tabernacle where it belonged.

When the Israelites in the wilderness would brake camp and move the Ark, Moses would proclaim, "Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you. Whenever it came to rest, he said, "Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel." (Numbers 10:35-36)

Psalms Sixty-eight begins with a liberal quote that was appropriate to the occasion, because they were about to move the Ark and David was now acting in the seat of Moses. I feel sure that David wanted more than to move an object from one place to another, what he really wanted was for this symbol of the presence of God to, in fact, be accompanied by the very presence of God himself. In bringing the Ark back to its rightful place in Israel, David also desired to honor God in the appropriate way. This was a happy occasion and he wanted all Israel to sing and praise the God of Israel who he considered worthy of the highest honor and praise. God has a rightful place to occupy in every nation, home and heart.

Sometimes in the course of life, people wander from the appropriate worship of the Lord God. While life is happening, we tend to forget that the presence of God should always be at the very center of all of life's activities. When the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they always moved the Ark to the center of the camping area and pitched the tabernacle to house it while they rested in their camp. All their activities were happening in the surrounding area with the Ark at the center of it all.

This is how it is supposed to be; God at the center and the enemies of our love, joy and peace scattered because of the presence of God. In those days the enemies were real flesh and blood, but today the enemies are not flesh and blood, but rather principalities and powers, the rulers of darkness, or in short Satan and his demonic horde. These principalities and powers of darkness are doing everything in their power to distract us from our life in Jesus.

As pastor I am always concerned when I see people getting too involved in the everyday activities of life and starting to neglect their worship of the Lord. As life gets busier and busier, it seems that the first thing that gets lost is church attendance and then personal devotional life. When people wander from the fellowship of Christian friends and begin to hobnob with the people who they have now come to know at a work place or in business associations, so changes in lifestyle begin to occur, be it ever so subtly. People who once walked close to the Lord are seen doing anything but walk close to the Lord. How did it happen? It always happens when we neglect to keep the presence of the Lord at the heart of our life's activities.

As King of Israel, David desired to keep the Lord at the heart of his nation. This was why he wrote Psalms and organized singers and worshippers.

Frequently in the Psalms David moves past the present and speaks prophetically. Such is the case in this Psalm where he says, "The Lord announced the word, and great was the company of those who proclaimed it: 'Kings and armies flee in haste; in the camps men divide the plunder. Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its

feathers with shining gold.’ When the Almighty scattered the kings in the land, it was like snow fallen on Zalmon.” (Psalms 68:11-14)

David may have been reflecting upon some historic event when he penned these words, but I see a prophetic implication in them as well. Jesus was the Word made flesh and dwelling among us. God was the giver of the Word and great is the host of ministers who are proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Principalities and powers flee when the gospel goes forth with power and people gather the spoils, (receive healings and miracles). The Dove is the Holy Spirit and while the people rest in peace among the campfires, he hovers over them teaching and illuminating the words of the Lord. The words sheathed with silver and feathered with gold make me think of the manner in which the Holy Spirit ministers knowledge and wisdom to the people of God.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the place where God chose to dwell, city of the living God; not a high and lofty mountain, but a highly honored mountain nonetheless. David loved Jerusalem because it was God’s city, the place where the temple would be built and a place that would be the symbolic capital of the Lord God until one day God would exalt her to her highest place with a whole new and holy city, the New Jerusalem. Thus, David penned these words of exaltation,

¹⁶ Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the LORD himself will dwell forever? ¹⁷ The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary.

When Jesus came into this world, Jerusalem was the focal point of the worship of God, and the temple was the place where God dwelt in the sense of national dealings, but Jesus was about to change all of that and fulfill the promises and purposes of the old religion of Judaism. The same God that had been experienced at Sinai, and had come to dwell in Jerusalem, and would become the Savior of the world and after accomplishing the work of redemption, would ascend on high leading the captive souls from past generations into the glory of their heavenly home. People would honor him in future generations and men who were once rebellious and sinful would bring gifts to him.

¹⁸ When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious—that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

¹⁹ Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. *Selah* ²⁰ Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.

David reveled in the knowledge of the Lord God. He would reflect upon the past, how God caused the earth to shake and how God also caused the earth to give bountifully to his beloved. He would look to the future and see the coming glory, but when he looked at the present he sometimes wondered why it looked so bleak. This is often the condition of mortal man; we see what is immediate and have a difficult time making any sense of it. We occupy a very small space on the panorama of the eternal scheme of things. Reflecting upon the past interventions of the Lord is a way to gain perspective and to draw strength knowing that God is the God of the now. He is the one who daily bears our burdens! Indeed, he is our Savior!

If we are self-consumed we will be filled with confusion and doubts. Those who possess the ability to look up and see that the throne of God eternal is just beyond our view, rejoice in the midst of perplexing circumstances and refuse to be overwhelmed with pain or suffering.

The revelation of the constant care of God was overwhelming to David, when at times he would realize that God was there in the midst, saving and redeeming his people. He said, “Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.” (Psalms 68:19) The reason we have difficulty in life is we forget to stop and consider the big picture; we fail to look up and see God is in control of even our little life.

³² Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, *Selah* ³³ to him who rides the ancient skies above, who thunders with mighty voice. ³⁴ Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel,

whose power is in the skies. ³⁵ You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people.
Praise be to God! (Psalms 68:32-35)

Chapter Seventy

Portrait of the Suffering Savior

Psalm 69

For the director of music. To the tune of “Lilies.” Of David.

Agony in Gethsemane

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. ² I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. ³ I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. ⁴ Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me.

Satan Stole Life from Humanity, but Jesus Gave it Back

I am forced to restore what I did not steal.

Transition as Sin-bearer Becomes a Reality

⁵ You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you.

Prayer for Strength to Fulfill the Mission

⁶ May those who hope in you not be disgraced because of me, O Lord, the LORD Almighty; may those who seek you not be put to shame because of me, O God of Israel. ⁷ For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face. ⁸ I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons; ⁹ for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me. ¹⁰ When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn; ¹¹ when I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me. ¹² Those who sit at the gate mock me, and I am the song of the drunkards.

Prayer for God to Rescue Jesus from the Grave

¹³ But I pray to you, O LORD, in the time of your favor; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation. ¹⁴ Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. ¹⁵ Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. ¹⁶ Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. ¹⁷ Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. ¹⁸ Come near and rescue me; redeem me because of my foes.

The Agony He must Endure During the Trial and On the Cross

¹⁹ You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed; all my enemies are before you. ²⁰ Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. ²¹ They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

Let Righteous Judgment be Their Portion

²² May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap. ²³ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. ²⁴ Pour out your wrath on them; let your

fierce anger overtake them. ²⁵ May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents. ²⁶ For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. ²⁷ Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. ²⁸ May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.

The Thank Offering is the Source of Strength

²⁹ I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me.

³⁰ I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. ³¹ This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs. ³² The poor will see and be glad— you who seek God, may your hearts live! ³³ The LORD hears the needy and does not despise his captive people.

Victory—The sacrifice is Acceptable

³⁴ Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them, ³⁵ for God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah. Then people will settle there and possess it; ³⁶ the children of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell there.

After Jesus and his disciples left the upper room where they had partaken of the Passover, they crossed the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus left his disciples and went a distance farther and prayed to his Father in Heaven. The hour of crucifixion was now upon him and he needed to talk to his Father.

The orthodox concept of Jesus is that he, while on earth, was every bit a man and at the same time every bit God. We also believe in the humility of Christ, meaning that, as a man he laid aside certain attributes of his Godhood so that he could function totally as a man while on earth. He was no less God, but in becoming a man he was also limited by the constraints common to man only without sin. While a man, during his years of ministry, he demonstrated that humans in right relationship with God might live above the normal restraints and demonstrate the love and compassion of the Father through faith. Jesus, though creator, still operated as a man, and as such, declared that the works they witnessed were not his, but rather, his Father was doing them.

When Jesus went to the Garden to pray, something interesting happened that is described in this Psalm. First, I note that the enormity of the hour began to settle in on him. His first reaction is to call upon his Father to save him, because he found himself sinking into a bottomless pit of mire. Water is overwhelming him as he sinks deeper and deeper into the depths.

So is the fate of lost humanity if salvation is not granted to each lost soul. The pit is our pit of destiny if we are not rescued, but he came to take our place, this was his mission on earth, but he found it an unbearable fate. In the Garden, Jesus prayed, “not my will but your will be done.”

The Psalmist observed the desperation that Jesus experienced in the Garden. As a man he wanted out of this whole thing, and who wouldn't? Who among us would want to experience sinking into unthinkable despair, darkness, gloom, and separation from all comfort and hope? This however, is what he was experiencing and yes, he had a choice in the matter, thus he prayed and prayed and prayed until he sweat great drops of blood. He wanted to please his Father, and yes, he wanted to complete his mission, but oh my, thinking about doing this and doing it are not the same!

The pit into which Jesus was sinking was filled with all the ugliness, despair, loneliness, hopelessness, hate, anger and violence that has stalked humanity from the fall. As Jesus embarked on this redemptive journey, the pain he was feeling was first spiritual then finally physical. Jesus always knew that not having the comforts of all the positives that comprised his very nature and being, would be unspeakably painful, but to actually be confronted with that experience was agonizing beyond belief.

For a person in extreme distress, hope is a solid rock upon which we can stand. Many people have found themselves in extremely helpless circumstances, but hope based on some concept has enabled them to maintain their sanity despite what was happening to them. Jesus was sinking into the pit of our muck and mire of sinfulness and judgment, and he couldn't find even a rock of

hope to put his foot upon. He wasn't the sinner, but he was guilty of our sins, as he had become the sin bearer.

Satan Stole Life from Humanity, but Jesus Gave it Back

Thus, the Psalmist penned the word, "I am forced to restore what I did not steal." (Psalms 69:4) John declared, "In him was life and that life was the light of men." (John 1:4) Life was what was lost to humanity in the Garden of Eden. The lack of life was what caused mankind to be so sinful and so violent.

Death in the heart and soul brings death to the body as well. Jesus, however, had life in him; therefore, he was different from all other humans on this earth. Just as death produces sin and violence, so life produces righteousness and healing. Therefore, Jesus came with healing for all who were blessed to come to him. He was a burst of light in a very dark world. Life and light filled his soul because God was his Father, not Adam. He had never experienced hatefulness, only the outreach of love because God is love.

It wasn't Jesus who sinned, but he was being called upon to pay the penalty of sin, nonetheless. The life of Adam was stolen away by the beguiling serpent, but Jesus was now here to restore what he did not steal.

While Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples slept the sleep of oblivion. The souls of sinners of all time were hanging in the balance that night and the success of the mission of Jesus was essential to their hope of salvation. The agonizing scene of Jesus wrestling with the realities of what he was setting out to do, was overwhelming. This was the most important single event since God created Adam and everyone on the planet was oblivious.

Had Jesus opted to out, he could have called ten thousand angels, and in a moment of time humanity would have been doomed to eternal hell, but he didn't! Love won the struggle that night even though he would have to take upon himself all the hate, anger, rage and murder of the ages; it was love in action that drove him to do it. He was becoming sin for us!

Transition as Sin-bearer Becomes a Reality

Oh the horror of such an event! Must he drink the cup? Yes, and drink it he did, thus, the Psalmist wrote, "You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you." (Psalms 69:5) Whose folly? Whose guilt? My folly and my guilt had become his folly and his guilt. He was not guilty of folly, nor was he guilty until he took my place as my sin bearer. Then the sin and guilt that was mine became his. This is the meaning of becoming the sin bearer. It was not easy for Jesus to take my place on the cross. The pain of it was not just from the physical sense of the word, but also more importantly from the spiritual sense.

In reading this Psalm, it is well to remember that this is written in poetic form and that phrases that apply prophetically also at times apply to life situations and feelings. Some people reading this Psalm think that David was going through some very distressing times and that this was a description of his emotions and feeling. Whereas this may be true, many great prophecies came as a result of suffering. What Jesus experienced for us on the cross was not at all unlike what people experience every day here on earth only that it we experienced it in bits and bites, but what he experienced was in a very concentrated form. David may very well have been thinking about his own folly and guilt because he certainly had his reasons to, but he was not unlike any of us, because we are all guilty and we've all been foolish. In the spirit of what the subject matter of this entire Psalm teaches us, it would be shallow and insufficient to not understand the prophetic implications throughout this Psalm.

Guilt is a heavy burden to bear and with the knowledge that it was pure folly that brought it to bear, it can be crushing. That was the sort of compressed guilt that Jesus bore for us on the cross. How can we do less than give him all our love, devotion, service and loyalty? He deserves more than we can ever give him.

Prayer for Strength to Fulfill the Mission

The requirement for Jesus to be the sin offering for the world was his personal perfection. One slip and he would have joined the entire human race in the pit of condemnation and the judgment of death would have been upon him. All hope would have been lost that the life that was in him could be somehow transferred to a waiting multitude of believers. The life would have left him and he too would have been lost in the abyss of death. Jesus knew full well that all was dependant upon him successfully carrying out his mission to the very end.

Jesus needed to be strengthened and refreshed for what lay ahead of him. I have called the act of Jesus dying for the sins of the world the greatest act of faith that ever was. If anything went wrong he would not have come forth from the tomb! He had laid aside his God qualities and became an offering for sin, thus he was totally dependant upon the Father to send resurrection power into his dead body and give him and us eternal life.

The requirement of righteousness is to never lash out or act in the retaliation of a flash of anger. When judgment must be rendered, it must be because it is the righteous thing to do. How easy it would have been for Jesus to lash out at his accusers. How easy it would have been to try to defend himself, forgetting that it was for us he stood there. For this reason Jesus prayed that he would not fail. Jesus was there to pay the penalty of men who had placed their faith in God for salvation in times past, he was there for those present and he was there for those who were yet to come. He didn't want anyone to face shame due to his failure or for their faith to go unrewarded.

Prayer for God to Rescue Jesus from the Grave

If this prayer was indeed a summation of what Jesus prayed in the garden, and I believe it is, then it is evident that he needed the very salvation he was purchasing for us. He didn't need it because he had sinned or was in any way deficient, but rather because he had totally taken our place and partaken of our guilt and in doing so became dependant upon the very sacrifice he was making for us, thus he prayed for salvation.

The Agony He must Endure During the Trial and On the Cross

It's not easy to listen to false accusations, or to bear the mocking of a crowd. Can you imagine what it must have been like standing there before Herod with people placing a kingly robe upon you and bowing before you in mockery? Then to be taken back to Pilot and to have the mockery go on being crowned with a crown of thorns and a purple robe being given to you and then to again be mocked and beaten and finally taken out and crucified.

Every blasphemer and sinner joined in the mockery the priests were heaping upon him. Mob psychology was in full force and there was no restraint being exercised. All the hate of Satan and his demonic horde along with hateful and rebellious humans created an atmosphere that only love could conquer. It was love that drove Jesus onward and it was love that enabled him to endure.

Let Righteous Judgment be Their Portion

There is a time for grace and there is a time for judgment. It doesn't matter how religious a person is or what faith they have had, if salvation is rejected, all hope is gone. The only thing there is for such an individual is a certain fearful waiting for the coming doom of judgment. By the actions of the people that day, their rejection of Jesus was evident. Even if they had made sacrifices and could have had a part in his salvation, they were disqualifying themselves by their participation in his death. He prayed that their names would be blotted out of the book of life, and that they would not be listed with the righteous. It's a fearful thing to reject God's Son Jesus. He is the only means of salvation, and faith in him is the requirement of eternal salvation. There

is not one shred of Biblical evidence that there is any hope outside of faith in Jesus. Judgment will come and woe to them upon whom it falls!

God's anger is not something to be aroused. When people reject God's gracious gift of love, when they scorn the Son he loves, can we wonder if the response is anger? The heart of God is capable of incredible grace, but incredible grace is the flip side of incredible anger. Grace cost God more pain than any of us can ever imagine, seeing his Son Jesus being mocked and falsely accused with the fury of unbridled hate, was more than his heart could bear, therefore he turned his back upon such ugliness and put his hand over the sun, and in that moment he heard Jesus lament, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

It wasn't Jesus God turned away from; it was the ugliness of sin. Jesus had partaken of the cup that contained all the ugliness and horrific evils, and also was the victim of all the hate and evil of this lost world. I have to wonder if the reason God turned away from Jesus was because he might have destroyed the world had he not.

Imagine having to watch your son doing what Jesus did, becoming not only the sin sacrifice for the world, but also the target of all the hate, violence and evil in the heart's of man. They didn't offer Jesus as one would offer a sacrificial lamb, no, they killed Jesus with mockery, hate and rejection; therefore, God's anger has been justly aroused and all who do evil will be judged. The day of God's grace will end, and for all who have rejected Jesus, hell awaits.

The Thank Offering is the Source of Strength

How can we bear pain when it is being born for love? Make it an offering of thanksgiving to God! There was a reason why Jesus subjected himself to such pain; it was love for the lost peoples of this world. The heart of God knows the difference between the cries of a lost soul caught in a snare and dragged into a pit, from one who is like a pig who loves the wallow in mud and filth. Unfortunately there are people who love the wallow of sin. No amount of pain will deter those whose hearts love evil. Jesus paid the full price for all sin, but only those who are willing to answer his call to repentance will benefit from the gift. The pain was for all sinners, and it was the gift of love. Love held Jesus on the cross, not the nails that were driven through his hands and feet.

Jesus was making a once and for all sacrifice and it was everything all the sacrifices that had ever been made represented. It was a sin offering, a guilt offering, a fellowship offering, a meal offering and a burnt offering, but it was also a thank offering unto God.

Have you ever been in a situation when it seemed that there was nothing to give thanks for? There was nothing of worldly gain or comfort for Jesus to focus upon as he hung on the cross. How could he endure such agony? Make an offering of thanksgiving unto the Lord! Have you ever given someone a gift of love? A gift of love is unconditional love given without request or desire from someone who needs it desperately. When a lost soul is sinking and someone reaches out with a lifeline of love, it is a gift of hope and grace. While on the cross Jesus was, as it were, weaving a rope to be cast to lost souls sinking in the mire of the pit of sinful indulgences. He had the offering of thanks to offer because he was a man of faith. Faith enables us to give thanks when everything around us seems like total destruction. Faith looks beyond the moment and sees into the heart and soul of Almighty God, and believes in a future that is bright and glorious.

If in the darkness of human perplexity you need to see goodness and have hope—make a thank offering to God. In the darkness of your night, look at the bright star of God's intervention that is coming to you soon. Never, never give up, but rather hope in God. Sing praises to him and worship will arise in your heart. There is no sweeter praise than the praise that comes from one who is offering a thank offering in the midst of dark experiences. God is deeply moved by such praise because it is genuine.

Victory—The sacrifice is Acceptable

No matter how dark the present hour may seem, salvation is straight ahead! Jesus paid it all, and everyone who names the name of Jesus in faith, will be a partaker of unspeakable joy and bliss forevermore. The land of Israel will once again be filled with praising worshipping people who have been redeemed by the blood of God's lamb Jesus.

Chapter Seventy-one

A Petition for Deliverance

Psalm 70

For the director of music. Of David. A petition.

¹ Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me. ² May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. ³ May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" turn back because of their shame. ⁴ But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "Let God be exalted!"

⁵ Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.

Does it seem that you pray the same prayer, over and over again? It seems that the words of this Psalm have been written a dozen or more times in various ways. "Save me" is a reoccurring theme as many are the days when it seems that God's intervention is desperately needed. One foe is conquered and low and behold another comes against us often stronger than the one just conquered. This world is not a land of peace because sin has caused it to be a land of conflicts.

Enemies in life come in many forms and attack us for a variety of reasons. Those who have children or grandchildren may at times be filled with concern for their spiritual well being. Spiritual attacks often come when we are pressing in the strongest. Just because spiritual attacks come it is no reason to turn back but rather, to press on because it is a good sign that new victories are being won.

Chapter Seventy-two

David's Dependence Upon the Lord

Psalm 71

¹ In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. ² Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. ³ Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. ⁴ Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men.

⁵ For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth. ⁶ From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you. ⁷ I have become like a

portent to many, but you are my strong refuge. ⁸ My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long.

⁹ Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. ¹⁰ For my enemies speak against me; those who wait to kill me conspire together. ¹¹ They say, "God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him." ¹² Be not far from me, O God; come quickly, O my God, to help me. ¹³ May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace.

¹⁴ But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. ¹⁵ My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure. ¹⁶ I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone. ¹⁷ Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. ¹⁸ Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

¹⁹ Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? ²⁰ Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. ²¹ You will increase my honor and comfort me once again.

²² I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. ²³ My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you— I, whom you have redeemed.

²⁴ My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion.

All who call upon the name of the Lord find that he is a safe refuge to protect from the violence of attacks that could otherwise overwhelm us. Satan is a foe that never gives up in his efforts to destroy us. The Psalmist had taken refuge in the Lord and was asking that the protection of the Lord never be lifted from him.

The Lord had been the one David had trusted in from his youth and there was no reason to change that. We never come to a time when we can afford to trust in anything of this world. We can have great physical strength but strength will not save us. We may accumulate a great storehouse of wisdom and knowledge, but in the end it will not save us.

When I read this Psalm through thoughtfully and prayerfully, it is like reading the story of my own life and experiences and is the expression of my heart's cry.

For those who are just beginning down the road of life, who have never experienced the troublous times that can come, this Psalm may seem like the babblings of an old man, but wait and remember what is said here, and soon, all too soon, you will identify with its words.

Sad are the people who are so full of pride that they cannot call upon the Lord to help them. They say that religion is for the weak, that it is a crutch, but how foolish to refuse a crutch, if you can't make your destination without one! Jesus said that we should pick up our cross and follow him, if a cross is a crutch, then we must pick it up. No one can make heaven without identification with the cross of Jesus.

First this cross is the place of redemption, that is, the place where Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world. Secondly, the cross is our personal symbol of surrender and our declaration of our need for a savior. Then it is also our attitude of life that says, "I will go wherever you wish me to go, stay as long as you wish me to stay, and do whatever you wish for me to do."

David focused upon the Lord and his righteousness, recognizing that it is God's righteousness that is important. God's righteousness and salvation are always the focus of believers. We cannot save ourselves, nor are our works of righteousness of any value to us when we come to God.

In a recent conversation it was mentioned to me that Jesus is coming for a church that is without spot or wrinkle, and in view of our conversation it seemed that the church of Jesus as we now see it is far from being without spot or wrinkle. My response was something to the effect, not to worry, the church that Jesus is referring to is a church of believers who have put their faith in Jesus and have put on the righteous robes of his righteousness. Christians who are without spot or wrinkle are Christians who know that there is no good thing in them, so they have put all trust in Jesus and his righteousness, trusting completely in his salvation and as a result have been given righteous robes that they neither deserved nor have earned.

Salvation is never about us; it is about God. He is the doer in everything that pertains to eternity. Our realm of domain has to do with what is of this world. We live a life doing all the human things that are normal to this life. Human endeavor, genius and creativity make this world a more desirable place live in, but the constant reality is that we are totally dependant upon what we cannot control, God. We cannot exist without what God has created. We take so much for granted, light, water, substance, none of which exist because of what we have done. How arrogant of man to think that he can go it alone! We think we are really smart if we discover some new field of science, develop some new technique to deal with an old problem that has plagued humanity, or solved some problem that didn't seem to have a solution, but all the while breathing God's air, and drinking his water. We work with tools and instruments that are all made of substances that God created! Man can do remarkable things, but God is still God and is worthy of our highest praise.

The Psalmist was concerned that, when in his waning years, he would be able to pass on the knowledge of the glory of the Lord to succeeding generations. David had acquired an understanding of God that most people don't seem to grasp, that God is a great and good God, and that he loves people. The idea that God is an egomaniac that only wants people to worship him to satisfy some sadistic desire to be worshipped was never a part of David's concept of God. He saw the Lord as a shepherd, as a lover of man, as a worthy protector, one who could be confided in, sought for counsel, and one who was worthy of our highest praise, worship, and trust. He saw God as worthy, not because God wanted that from him, but because it is a fact that is based on the most well defined truth, God is everything we have ascribed to him and much, much more.

The hope of a resurrection of the dead is a strong reality. Christians have what is called, the blessed hope, a truth so deeply engrained in the fabric of Christian theology that it is synonymous with belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. The truth that Jesus arose from the grave is the source of hope and faith of all believers. Without the resurrection, we would of all people be the most miserable. We would have no assurance of salvation, no hope of anything beyond the grave, and only a fear that if indeed we would meet God that we would be condemned as wicked. The reason we can justly hope in the sacrifice of Jesus is because his resurrection validated all his claims! We have access to the Father because of what he did.

The Psalmist lived in the hope of the resurrection, he wrote, "Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again." (Psalms 71:20-21)

Chapter Seventy-three

Solomon / The King of Glory

Psalm 72

Of Solomon.

¹ Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. ² He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. ³ The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. ⁴ He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.

⁵ He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. ⁶ He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. ⁷ In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.

⁸ He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. ⁹ The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. ¹⁰ The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. ¹¹ All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.

¹² For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. ¹³ He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. ¹⁴ He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

¹⁵ Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. ¹⁶ Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. ¹⁷ May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.

All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.

¹⁸ Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. ¹⁹ Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen.

²⁰ This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.

Its difficult to read this Psalm without thinking that there is a prophetic dimension that reaches beyond Solomon. In the scriptures, Solomon types Jesus in his role of the triumphant reign that will occur when he comes back to rule and reign for a thousand years upon the earth.

In Solomon's lifetime some of these prophecies were fulfilled in a measure, but the full scope of what is said here was never realized. Had Solomon walked in total obedience to the commands of God and never married heathen women, or allowed idolatry within the land, he may have experienced much more than he did.

Many times in scripture we encounter this phenomenon where prophecies have both an immediate application at least in part, but have a more distant and full application in time yet to come.

In considering what was in the heart of King David as he wrote this Psalm, I feel sure he was primarily thinking of his young son that was soon to take charge of the kingdom. True to the heart of David, the cry was that this king would rule in righteousness.

David was truly a shepherd king who cared for the people of the nation. He was very desirous that they be ruled in justice and righteousness and that the weak and afflicted would be cared for. This Psalm expressed more than the heart of David, it is the very heart of God for his people. If we will just walk in righteousness, we will be blessed both in this life and in the life to come! David desired that the land respond to the goodness of the people who occupy it. This was not just a fanciful thought on David's part, it was promised to them in Duet. 28.

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

³ You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

⁴ The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

⁵ Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

⁶ You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

⁷ The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

⁸ The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

⁹ The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. ¹⁰ Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. ¹¹ The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you.

¹² The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. ¹³ The

LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. ¹⁴ Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.

Although this is the covenant of the law that God gave to Moses, along with the curses for disobedience that followed in the same chapter, the promises are an expression of the heart of God for all people. There is a basic difference between the Covenant of the Law that required obedience to reap good benefits, and the New Covenant that grants blessings as a result of our relationship to Jesus.

A basic difference between the two covenants was that the Covenant of the Law was visited upon the natural world possessions and offspring, whereas the New Covenant visits the heart and mind and relationship of people to God.

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:10-13)

There are people today who are still trying to benefit from the old covenant, while being a part of the New Covenant Church. Seeking to receive the blessings of the old covenant while being a part of the New Covenant is the source of much disillusionment and despair. God still likes to bless people with good things in this world, but it is not out of obligation that he blesses because if we got what we deserve it would be death! God does so many wonderful things for people, but not because we earned it or deserve it, but rather, because he is good and loving.

Solomon was never worthy of the blessings outlined in the Covenant of the Law, because he never fully obeyed the Lord. If God had given him what he deserved, it would not have been a pretty picture. There was a coming Son of David who would be worthy, his name is Jesus. What David desired for Solomon, although partially fulfilled, was and will be fully fulfilled in Christ.

Book Three

Psalms 73-89

Chapter Seventy-Four

The Heritage of the Believers

Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph.

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with

violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"

¹² This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.

¹³ Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus,"

I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰ As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

This Psalm, accredited to Asaph, tells how he almost lost his way and slipped into the abyss. Have you ever stood where he stood and looked at what the wicked are doing? Have you ever noticed that wicked people often prosper and are in better health than a lot of Christians? Does that bother you as a Christian? It bothered Asaph, a lot. It just doesn't seem right, where is justice in that? A person lives their life doing all the things they have been taught they are supposed to do, and what do they get? Problems! We tend to forget that when we became a Christian we changed our citizenship and now we are citizens of the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. He taught us that if we were of the world, the world would love its own! Asaph saw that the wicked prosper, and are in good health, and he evidently was struggling to make ends meet and may have had some health problems as well.

Some preachers have told us that all we have to do is use our faith and pay our tithes and wealth will come to us. This idea came as the result of some well meaning preachers that at one time were subjected to preachers saying that it was a blessed thing to be poor. Some people would even glory in their poverty and sicknesses.

I personally do not believe that God is the God of sickness or poverty. Quite the contrary, I believe that the very nature and heart of God is totally positive and health and provisions are as natural to God as righteousness and holiness. One thing I have noticed is that when it comes to great wealth, very few genuine Christians are listed among the very rich of the earth. In fact, some of the wickedest people are also the wealthiest!

Asaph needed an adjustment in his worldview. He started looking from the perspective of natural life concerns and forgot that we are primarily children of eternal concerns. He almost lost his foothold; then he went to the house of God. In the sanctuary he realized a truth he almost forgot, judgment is coming!

What is happening to us in this world is temporary, what is eternal is our spiritual life in Christ. We work long and hard to create a comfort zone in which to dwell, but God knows that comfort zones tend to spiritual poverty. If we want to be rich in Christ, we must keep our eyes on the prize. God loves us enough that if he allows us to become too comfortable we will suffer in the end for it. It is a loving God that allows enough pressure in life so we keep looking for the city that has foundations, our eternal home in heaven.

Taking scriptures out of context can be very misleading. Here are some scriptures out of context in this passage to illustrate the point.

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

⁴They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills ⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. —always carefree, they increase in wealth.”

Now read the full text at the head of this chapter and you will see what I mean. The reason I did this is to illustrate that this out of context printout sounds so much like what is being preached in some circles! If we don't examine the full counsel of God it's easy to be deceived. It's so easy for clever people to twist the scriptures without even misquoting a verse!

My wife's mother used to say, “A truth told with bad intent beats all the lies one can invent!” I think the scriptures I pulled out of Psalms 73 illustrate the point very well. The words do not apply to the pure in heart but rather the wicked! This makes me shudder when I think of how so many well meaning, God fearing, Jesus loving, Spirit filled people have been lead astray by clever manipulators of the truths of God's word. What drives them? Isn't it greed—the love of money and wealth and a desire for attention and fame?

Successful churches these days are often measured by how many people gather, how much excitement can be generated, and how many endeavors can be completed. The truth is that none of those things have anything to do with eternal values.

Eternal values are measured on the basis of how much of the true Spirit of Jesus is being seen. Are people being lead to the cross, to repentance and to lives reflecting the holiness of God? What Jesus is being worshipped? Is he a fantasy of the mind, a rewrite of the God of wealth? Do we think that he is only interested in how healthy our bodies are?

I do not believe that sick bodies bring glory to God, however, when I see a sick body and at the same time a spirit that radiates the glory of God, I am struck with the contrast and that brings glory to God! God is glorified in the healing of sick bodies, but so is he glorified in the heart of the person who also has fully embraced the spirit of the cross. Those who triumph over the tendency to murmur and complain when some discomfort is upon them because they have embraced the spirit of the cross, bring glory to God. It is when we are able to transcend all the struggle, pain and discomforts of this life and praise and worship God that we are truly worshipping the Lord. It is appropriate to ask for healing, provisions, and whatever else will bring relief from the discomforts common to this life, because God is not a God of pain, but rather of health, happiness and plenty.

Righteousness is not measured by either our wealth or how healthy our bodies are. The wicked are often both healthy and wealthy and also carefree! They are full of faith and their words lay hold of heaven and earth! They succeed in grand endeavors and are successful in all their ways, but the Psalmist declared that when he went to the sanctuary he realized that they were standing on dangerous ground because judgment day was coming.

¹Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

²³Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁷Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Notice in this quote I have given the same lead in scripture that I used in the description of the wicked. The result is quite different, however, because it applies correctly. This is the true description of the righteous. They have the Lord, not necessarily health or wealth, he counsels them in life and afterward they go to be with him forever! He is their refuge the strength of their heart!

Chapter Seventy-five

Tragedy, God's Hand of Protection Gone!

Psalm 74

A maskil of Asaph.

¹ Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? ² Remember the people you purchased of old, the tribe of your inheritance, whom you redeemed—Mount Zion, where you dwelt. ³ Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins, all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary.

⁴ Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs. ⁵ They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees. ⁶ They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets. ⁷ They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name. ⁸ They said in their hearts, "We will crush them completely!" They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land. ⁹ We are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be.

¹⁰ How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? ¹¹ Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them!

¹² But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth. ¹³ It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. ¹⁴ It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert. ¹⁵ It was you who opened up springs and streams; you dried up the ever flowing rivers. ¹⁶ The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. ¹⁷ It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter.

¹⁸ Remember how the enemy has mocked you, O LORD, how foolish people have reviled your name. ¹⁹ Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever. ²⁰ Have regard for your covenant, because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land. ²¹ Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace; may the poor and needy praise your name.

²² Rise up, O God, and defend your cause; remember how fools mock you all day long. ²³ Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries, the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.

The nation of Israel failed to take seriously the call of God upon them and in the intervening years after David was no longer king, his descendents allowed idolatry to fill the land with all the accompanying evil practices and violations of the commands of the Lord. There were good times when in the mercy of God, men were raised up who had the love of God in their hearts and some kings were also Godly men, but the history of the nation reflected hardness of heart and an underlying love for sin.

The Spirit of God will not always strive with man. There comes a point where, if we persist in going our own way, God will allow it. The result will be that God will also begin a process of lifting his protection that has been upon us. The result of this lifting of God's protection may be that we will find ourselves struggling with things we never thought we would have to struggle with.

I know a man at the prison where I minister as a religious volunteer who was raised in church and taught the ways of the Lord, but as a young man was enticed to walk in sinful ways. Satan has a way of blinding our eyes to the consequences of a misspent life. One day he was in a place where drugs were involved in whatever it was that was happening, when things went bad and someone was killed. I don't know all the details of what happened, but I do know this fine man really loves the Lord and is a leader in the prison church. I feel sure in my heart that he never ever dreamed that the road he chose to walk would lead to being locked away in prison for the rest of his life.

When I read of the devastation that came upon Israel and even the holy sanctuary where God's power was once so strong that the ministers couldn't even stand to minister, I reflect upon some of the fine ministers of my day that also played around with sin and lost the touch of God. How tragic when Satan is granted access to the holy place where God is supposed to dwell, and begins to devastate the holy attitude that once was so much a part of their life.

I was working on a carpenter job one day and met a man who was once on fire for God. Now his mouth was speaking words that he knew were not glorifying to the Lord, and there was evidence of other fleshly ways that were symptomatic of a heart grown cold toward the Lord. My heart is grieved when I see people like that, but at the same time, I feel warned that if I allow anything to abide in my heart and mind that is not according to the Holy Spirit's ways, I am also at risk of experiencing devastations that Satan would love to visit upon me.

How hard it is to look upon the conditions where Satan has been given free reign in someone's life and then to see the way that even the holy things of God become objects of disgrace. People who once walked with God now are full of bitter and blasphemous words. The Psalmist cried out because of the devastations he saw at the sanctuary where the glory of the Lord once dwelt being wreaked with axes and hatchets.

I have heard many stories about ministers who once feared the Lord, stand in the pulpit before their congregations and tell lies. Where is the fear of God? Don't people know that God in heaven sees and hears what is taking place? I have also heard of congregations who have treated their ministers disrespectfully because of a flaw they perceived or some irritating way or manner of speech.

Sin and wickedness will be judged on the Day of Judgment, but the utter devastations we see in the meanwhile are painful to look upon. How long will God look upon the ways of man and not reveal his mighty hand to deliver the righteous from the oppression of the wicked? I suppose he will wait until the sufferings have produced the quality of character that he is looking for in us. God loves humanity and is preparing us for an eternal place in his kingdom forever. Whatever it takes to prepare us will be worth the wait in the end.

Chapter Seventy-six

Blessing or Judgment, Which Will It Be?

Psalm 75

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." A psalm of Asaph. A song.

¹We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds.

²You say, "I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly. ³When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm. *Selah* ⁴To the arrogant I say, 'Boast no more,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horns. ⁵Do not lift your horns against heaven; do not speak with outstretched neck.'"

⁶No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. ⁷But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. ⁸In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.

⁹As for me, I will declare this forever; I will sing praise to the God of Jacob. ¹⁰I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.

The day is coming when the righteous will be seen to be righteous and all wickedness will be exposed to be what it truly is. God's name will be exalted and the righteous will praise him. Sometimes in this world it's hard to make sense of all the suffering that even righteous people suffer, but when we look beyond the parameters of this life, we see a kingdom that is eternal and a land that is the native land of the righteous.

I remember in my younger years singing a song about how this world is not my home, a truth that is sometimes neglected in the preaching of some who are emphasizing the here and now as being of primary concern. I see the here and now as an opportunity to do something that is eternal in nature, that can only be done in this present circumstance. The reason to keep the heavenly vision well in focus is so that we won't place too much emphasis on what is temporal in nature and thus neglect what is eternal.

The Psalmist picks up the theme of a preacher warning those who are careless, proud and arrogant. There are people in this world who feel that they have a right to even judge God, arrogantly they strut themselves as if they are invincible. Symbols of power or strength are referenced to in this psalm as horns. People with shallow thoughts and without spiritual insights put very much emphasis upon the natural strength of their physical bodies. They often feel mighty to drink strong alcoholic beverages, thinking they are able to handle it, but they don't perceive that they are drinking the bitter dregs of their folly. God is the judge that we must all face one day, and when we do, all will be manifest that has not been given over to Jesus.

God is a good God who loves people; of this I have no doubt, yet there are many people who are not in a position to enjoy the outpouring of his love. When we hang on to ideas or attitudes that are contrary to the spirit of truth, God sees and will do what is necessary to change us into the person he created us to be.

God has a heart full of love for anyone who will open his heart to receive it. Like a reservoir that has been filling and filling with only a few hearts open to receive it, it has been building and building, waiting for someone to open their heart to let his love flow in. When a person is in a position to receive it, God will abundantly fill their heart with his love because love is what he is!

God will judge the wicked and all wickedness will be revealed to be just that, wickedness. Those who would strut proudly against the Lord God ought to listen to the warning, what has been decreed will certainly come to pass.

Chapter Seventy-Seven

Fear God, Serve God

Psalm 76

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of Asaph. A song.

¹In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. ²His tent is in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. ³There he broke the flashing arrows, the shields and the swords, the weapons of war. *Selah*

⁴You are resplendent with light, more majestic than mountains rich with game. ⁵Valiant men lie plundered, they sleep their last sleep; not one of the warriors can lift his hands. ⁶At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both horse and chariot lie still. ⁷You alone are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry? ⁸From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet— ⁹when you, O God,

rose up to judge, to save all the afflicted of the land. *Selah* ¹⁰ Surely your wrath against men brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained.

¹¹ Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfill them; let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared. ¹² He breaks the spirit of rulers; he is feared by the kings of the earth.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God is so in control of what happens in this life that he can end our life in a moment of time. Sometimes we feel in control of everything that is happening to us, thinking we have covered all our bases; we are healthy, strong, smart, and talented—but in control, never.

The Christian world has been anxiously awaiting the coming of the Lord Jesus back to earth again, and when that event happens, he will judge the wicked and install a righteous kingdom upon this earth. Meanwhile, Jesus is coming individually for people everyday. We don't know the moment of his call for us. We may assume that long life will be our portion, but lots of people have assumed such to be true only to have it interrupted at the most unexpected moments.

Wisdom decrees that serving Jesus with all our hearts is the wise thing to do everyday. Never assume that you have many days yet upon the earth, and therefore, you can afford to live carelessly. When we're healthy and have lots of money, we may feel like we can do whatever we please and it is okay. The scriptures talk about people who feel mighty to drink wine and strong drink, but we know these same people lack the power that comes from living a righteous life.

In this Psalm, the Psalmist talks about an army of young healthy men, lying on the ground having been killed in battle. They were strong and healthy, but the wounds of war suddenly snatched their life away. The reason this happened to them was that they had attack the Lord's people, not a wise thing to do. Many people bring God's displeasure upon themselves by attacking another Christian, doing them harm by word or deed. If you want to get God upset at you, do something to bring harm to one of his children.

God makes his home with those who are humble in heart and who love his appearing. Those who are anxiously waiting his appearing are usually people who are actively serving the Lord. Those who fear his coming are people who know that their life is full of sinful indulgences that will cause shame to separate them from the good pleasure of his presence.

Chapter Seventy-eight

When God Seems Far Away, Remember

Psalm 77

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A psalm.

¹ I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. ² When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.

³ I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. *Selah* ⁴ You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. ⁵ I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; ⁶ I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

⁷ "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? ⁸ Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" *Selah*

¹⁰ Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." ¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. ¹² I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

¹³ Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? ¹⁴ You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. ¹⁵ With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

¹⁶ The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. ¹⁷ The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. ¹⁸ Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. ¹⁹ Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.

²⁰ You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Do you think it's easy for God to look upon all the sorrow and evil in this world? Do you think he is calloused and uncaring? It may look like that to us, but God is a God of love. I struggled with the question of why was it some of the finest people I know suffer the most. I asked the Lord about this, and to my astonishment he spoke to me that it's not what's wrong with them that has caused this, but rather, what is right with them.

Some time ago my wife and I enjoyed going to the ocean where we could find pretty rocks and some were agates. We would bring them home and put some of them that we were especially impressed with into our rock polisher. They were subjected to a grinding compound and a constant turning and tumbling until the rough surface was worn away revealing the beauty that was hidden beneath the contaminates and roughness of the surface.

There are times when it does seem that God doesn't care one wit about what is happening to us, but wait, what is that I hear? Is that God coming to us laden down with good things to shower upon us? How long does it take before God removes us from the grinder? I am sure it varies from person to person. The hardest material takes the longest to polish, but the end result is also the best! Is this why some of the finest people in the body of Christ who love the Lord with all their hearts and souls also seem to suffer the most? That's what the Spirit spoke to me. It takes a person who has a heavenly vision to understand and appreciate such a concept. I have observed that it often takes a lifetime of polishing to get a person to the point where the real beauty of Christ can be seen in them, and then God takes them home. If what he is doing is for a witness in this world, don't you think God is wasting a lot of time on some people?

This world is not the place where God's work will be put on display. This world is like a quarry where stones are mined and then hewn to the exact specifications of the master builder. When Solomon was assigned the task of building the temple of God, he sent workmen to the forest to cut down trees and to hew them into beams for special purposes in the temple of the Lord. He also sent workmen to the quarry to prepare stones for the walls and when all was completed and brought to the temple site, we are told that, not even the sound of a hammer or chisel was heard! If human craftsmen can do their work that precisely, don't you think the Holy Spirit can do his work even better?

In the process of seasoning it sometimes seems that we have been set aside and forgotten about. It's not easy to be put in a compound where all is quiet and nothing seems to be happening. Those are times when patient endurance is necessary as God is seasoning us and our faith is being tested to see if we are able to stand at attention even when there seems to be no reason to stand.

When a teacher gives a test to a class of students, not only are the students being tested, but the teacher is also being tested. If the students do well on the exam it probably indicates the teacher has done well in instructing them. If all the students seem to struggle with the same questions then the teacher must not have taught that part well enough. Good teaching results in good students. Student failures are a reflection of poor teaching skills. God is the best possible teacher and he will prevail in the end.

God always sees from eternity. We see from the temporal. We tend to assign values based on the benefit we derive from an event. If we can't see a benefit that is realized in the here and now, we tend to feel there is no benefit. People, who have done quite well without a direct relationship with God, fail to see the benefit of a relationship.

When Christians encounter people who have done quite well without a relationship with God, and then they look at their own life with all the perplexities they see there—it's hard to understand that doing quite well has little if any value as a catalyst to produce eternal values.

What do we want, a great life in the present world, or do we want a great eternal life? I am sure that most people will answer that they want both. I too want both, however, if I must choose, I will choose eternal values over anything temporal. This is not an emotional choice, it is purely a choice based on information gathered in a lifetime of serving the Lord. I look at what I have received from the world, and what I have received from serving God and when examined in the light of what they have produced in matters of peace, love and joy, there is no question the work of God in my heart is all that matters.

Did what I find in my spirit come from the struggles I experienced or the good things that God has added to my life in the material realm? My response is probably both. If everything that happens to us is struggle without seeing the provisions of the Lord, we will likely despair. I have struggled a great deal in my life, but in the midst of my struggles I saw the hand of the Lord helping me, enabling me, directing me, and at times supernaturally sustaining me. It is this reality that has produced in me the qualities of trust, patience, endurance, and a love, joy and peace that is a vital part of my spiritual character. Without the struggles none of these characteristics would be in evidence in my life. We learn that we can trust the Lord when we are caught in a circumstance where there is no other answer than a divine intervention.

The Psalmist was going through a period of time when it seemed that God was nowhere to be found. He couldn't see any immediate evidence that God was even conscious of his circumstances.

I've been there, feeling overwhelmed by circumstances, and not being able to see any way out.

On one such occasion I was working on a farm and it was my duty to repair the property line fence once a year. In the course of time, things would happen to the fence and it was necessary to make repairs. The terrain was a hilly area with large patches of brush. In one particular area the fence went right into the brush and there was no evident way of following it without going into the brush and making my way along the fence line. After following it for sometime I became totally disoriented. I didn't have any idea where I was or how to get out of where I was, but then I thought, "If I follow the wire, I will come out where I am supposed to be." Someone had built the fence before the brush grew around it, so following it made good sense. So follow it I did and soon I was safely out of the brush.

On a later occasion I was in an overwhelming circumstance and I remembered the wire and the brush patch. In the circumstance, it seemed like I was in a dense fog and couldn't see anything that gave me hope, except one thing, I remembered that someone bigger than I was watching over me. If I would keep on going, doing what must be done, he would guide me through the circumstance and all would be well in the end.

The spiritual benefit I derived from these circumstances was far more valuable than some superficial rescue from them would have been. These circumstances have become a part of the faith structure of my life and have enabled me to be calm in many storms that have followed.

The Psalmist may have lacked experiences in his personal life to draw encouragement from, but he knew what was needed. He needed to remember the good things he had been taught about God and his faithfulness, therefore, he began to recount all he had been taught about the Lord. He knew the stories about how God had rescued Israel from Egypt and many such events. He knew God was a God of unfailing love; therefore, he encouraged himself with that knowledge. In the beginning of our faith walk we lack the benefit of being able to remember personal interventions to encourage our faith, but we have the Bible that is so full of wonderful stories that when brought to mind and dwelt upon will bring what is needed to anchor our faith.

Did the circumstances change for the Psalmist in this Psalm? If so he didn't say, but one thing seems evident, the Psalmist took courage as he meditated upon the goodness of God.

It's all a matter of time. Will the answer we think we need come in the here and now or will it wait for the day when we are gathered into the heavenly realm to ever be with the Lord? Some answers come now, others wait for eternity, but all answers come and we are blessed by their coming.

Chapter Seventy-nine

The Unfaithfulness of Israel

Psalm 78

A maskil of Asaph.

¹O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. ²I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—³ what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. ⁴We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. ⁵He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, ⁶ so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. ⁷Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. ⁸They would not be like their forefathers— a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

⁹The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; ¹⁰ they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. ¹¹They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them. ¹²He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan. ¹³He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall. ¹⁴He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. ¹⁵He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; ¹⁶ he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers. ¹⁷But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. ¹⁸They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. ¹⁹They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert?" ²⁰When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?" ²¹When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, ²² for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance. ²³Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; ²⁴ he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. ²⁵Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat. ²⁶He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. ²⁷He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. ²⁸He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. ²⁹They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved. ³⁰But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths, ³¹ God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.

³²In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe. ³³So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror. ³⁴Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again. ³⁵They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. ³⁶But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; ³⁷ their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. ³⁸Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. ³⁹He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

⁴⁰How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! ⁴¹Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel. ⁴²They did not remember his power—the day he redeemed them from the oppressor, ⁴³ the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the region of Zoan. ⁴⁴He turned their rivers to blood; they could not drink from their streams. ⁴⁵He sent swarms of flies that devoured them, and frogs that devastated them. ⁴⁶He gave their crops to the

grasshopper, their produce to the locust. ⁴⁷ He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamore-figs with sleet. ⁴⁸ He gave over their cattle to the hail, their livestock to bolts of lightning. ⁴⁹ He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility—a band of destroying angels. ⁵⁰ He prepared a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death but gave them over to the plague. ⁵¹ He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham. ⁵² But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert. ⁵³ He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies. ⁵⁴ Thus he brought them to the border of his holy land, to the hill country his right hand had taken. ⁵⁵ He drove out nations before them and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance; he settled the tribes of Israel in their homes.

⁵⁶ But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes. ⁵⁷ Like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, as unreliable as a faulty bow. ⁵⁸ They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols. ⁵⁹ When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely. ⁶⁰ He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men. ⁶¹ He sent the ark of his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy. ⁶² He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance. ⁶³ Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs; ⁶⁴ their priests were put to the sword, and their widows could not weep.

⁶⁵ Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a man wakes from the stupor of wine. ⁶⁶ He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame. ⁶⁷ Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; ⁶⁸ but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved. ⁶⁹ He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever. ⁷⁰ He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; ⁷¹ from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. ⁷² And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

Shepherds are a gift of love from God. David was a shepherd of sheep who also became a shepherd of the nation of Israel. The Lord had done mighty wonders for the nation of Israel, acts of deliverance, provisions and protection, but when finally delivered into the land he had promised them, they forsook serving the Lord. It was much easier to live by the liberal philosophy of the heathens than to live by the commands of the Lord.

We all have fallen natures that must be dealt with if we are to please the Lord. God gave the law to the people of Israel so that their fallen natures would be held within limits of love so they would not destroy one another. The law was given for the lawlessness within man to restrain it and contain it. Sin was not being driven from the heart of man, because the spirit of life was not yet given.

Sin is the symptom of spiritual death that is resident in the heart of every person until the spirit of eternal life is given. It is the presence of the spirit of life within the heart of man that brings about real change.

Man without Christ needs law to prevent him from sinning. It is the fear of God and the knowledge of law that causes people to obey. Natural man has a system of restraints to prevent him from doing destructive things. First, there is the home, teachings of parents, grandparents, and other family and friends. Even siblings contribute to the restraint system at times. Children are taught to respect and obey their parents and other elders, and as long as respect is earned by proper behaviors, the system works quite well. It is when respect is lost that the line of defense begins to break down.

When children are told not to drink and then see their parents getting drunk, the words of the parents lose the power to restrain them for very long. If people are seen to be sinning and enjoying it, the temptation to also sin becomes real.

We are now living in an era of time like none other that has ever been on the face of the earth. Until recent times the lack of communications, busy lives and economic restraints have held people from self-destructing on indulgences of their sinful natures. This is the age of communications that was only rivaled in a small way before the tower of Babel was built. At that time, because of the sin in the hearts of men, people were getting worse and worse and even thought that they could build a tower into heaven and thus subdue it. Rather than give the law at that time, God saw fit to scatter people across the earth and by confusing their languages he was able to disrupt their communications with one another. Thus people of like tongue went to an area and started a new culture as they saw fit and soon lost contact with one another. Whereas the

grandiose ideas were replaced with the more practical needs of survival, the sin was still in the hearts of these people. The knowledge of God also became clouded, as there was no written Bible to look to for guidance.

The next restraint system that people have in their lives is the cultural restraints. This is where law comes into play. Afterward it is their knowledge of God and the fear of God. This is why it is so important that there is a clear and correct concept of God taught to every generation. Families will fail, law systems will become corrupt, but when the concept of God is perverted, chaos will follow.

The nation of Israel had been blessed above all people on the face of the earth because God in his love had given them so much. He took them out of the land of Egypt where they lived as slaves, and gave them a revelation of the reality of his presence. He delivered them from their enemies and gave them a law based on truth. The law was the basis of a new culture and a pure religious form was also given in which to worship. In just a few short months after leaving Egypt, the nation of Israel had a new culture, a national identity, a law second to none, a new religious form that included a system of sacrifices, a priesthood, a tabernacle that could be moved from place to place that provided a visual focal point of all religious events. They were the most advanced nation on earth in everything but an external kingdom. Soon God gave them the land of promise to be their native homeland, much to the dismay of the nations around them. The nations didn't appreciate the presence of these people in what they had considered their land.

Once more in our generation, God has orchestrated the return of these people to the Promised Land, much to the dismay of those who lived there. No other nation on the face of the earth has a homeland given to them by God. Other nations have been allowed to occupy the land during the years of their exile, but the land is still theirs because God gave it to them. The mind of corrupt man cannot understand this kind of justice, but they would do well to pull back and bless the nation of Israel with peace. Those who resist the purpose of God will suffer and suffer and suffer, but those who accept what it is that he is doing, will be blessed.

The nation of Israel has been the target of satanic oppression, deception, and has tempted them into all sorts of sinful activities. He does this to kindle the anger of the Lord against them for forsaking the Lord and going after the false gods of the heathen. Time and again, the nation of Israel has suffered at the hands of their enemies until they have cried out to the Lord for deliverance.

The world today is in turmoil, as a result of the terrible things that are happening. In the moment of national disaster, when people feel that their lives are being threatened, they turn to God, but as soon as things quiet down they go back to sinning as usual. It's easier to trust the efforts of man than to turn to God and repent of their sins. Many people today, are worried about the threat of nuclear bombs, chemical warfare, or some biological threat, forgetting that the greatest threat to human life comes from the sinful activities they indulge in every day. The chances of dying from a bomb or chemical attack statistically are probably the lowest chance we face. We are in greater danger everyday as we drive along the highways and or walk our streets.

If people could just understand that life is very fragile, and that having peace with God is so vital, I feel sure they would serve the Lord. The Bible has warned us that we have a choice as to where we will spend eternity. The choice is a no-brainer, but people don't heed the warning. No one in their right mind would choose to go to hell when heaven is so available, yet they do.

Life altering events happen when we least expect them. In an instant of time one can go from being healthy and strong to being paralyzed for life. As I write this a bus loaded with young people from a church ran into a bridge abutment killing four and injuring thirty something. It is said that they were only forty-five minutes into a weekend retreat that no one thought for a moment would end this way. On the face of it at least, the sort of group it seemed to be, one could safely hope that those who lost their earthly life were ready to enter heaven, but the reality is that it is a very individual matter. We never know the moment that we will be called from this world, in many cases it will be sooner than any of us ever imagined.

In the time of trial many people turn to the Lord, but do they remember when the immediate trial is over? The nation of Israel was an ongoing trial to the Lord because time and again they would repent and seek the Lord, then when all was well they would go back to their sinful ways. Their commitment to the Lord was as shallow as what we see happening right here in America. I remember after the World Trade Center was attack, how our lawmakers gathered on the capital steps and declared unity, but how long did it last? Before they could clear away the rubble, the wrangling had already begun. The actions and lives of most people have returned to what they were before the event. This is what God has seen happen from the very beginning of time. How long will he let it go on? Can God be blamed when he grows weary of dealing with such shallowness of heart and life?

Despite our bad record as people, God still goes on with his eternal plan. He raises up men as he did for the nation of Israel. It wasn't because the nation was so dedicated to the Lord that he rewarded them with a great king; rather, it was because God was faithful to his will and plan for salvation for all who will accept it.

Chapter Eighty

Why Should We be Judged?

Psalm 79

A psalm of Asaph.

¹ O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. ² They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. ³ They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. ⁴ We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us.

⁵ How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire? ⁶ Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name; ⁷ for they have devoured Jacob and destroyed his homeland. ⁸ Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need.

⁹ Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. ¹⁰ Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants. ¹¹ May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die.

¹² Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at you, O Lord. ¹³ Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

How sad it is when, after judgment has fallen, we look about and see nothing but devastation and wonder why did it have to come to this? The nation of Israel, and particularly Judah, had a long history of playing it loose with God. It's easy to begin to think that God doesn't see, that he doesn't care that we are living in sinful deeds or attitudes. The tone of this Psalm seems to indicate that it was written late in the history of their nation. It wasn't until just before they were carried away into captivity that such devastation was allowed to happen as is described here. God had appealed to them to repent and had plead with them to return to him, but it only caused a brief stir in their hearts before hardness set in at an even greater level.

Jesus taught us that what we sow is what we will reap. If we sow to our flesh, we will reap corruption from the flesh. That is to say, if we live pandering to our fallen natures committing sins that are the result of that nature, we will reap according to the deeds we have done. Sinning may be fun, but reaping is not easy.

There are times when God uses nations as instruments of judgment upon the object of his judgment. On one occasion, a nation was allowed to come against the nation and win a victory causing many Israelites to flee. When the nation that they hoped to find refuge in saw an opportunity to gain vengeance upon them and attacked those fleeing, God rebuked them for what they did because they were taking advantage of those being judged. Just because God is disciplining someone for a misdeed doesn't mean that it is okay to pile on, so to speak, and take out our personal feelings against him or her.

As a parent I recall situations where I would be disciplining one of my children and then one of the other children would jump in and try to help me. The result was that I would have to turn my attention to the interfering child because; their desire for vengeance was more serious than what I was disciplining the first child for. God doesn't need our help, nor does he appreciate it if we interfere when he is dealing with someone.

The Psalmist spoke to the Lord asking, "How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?" and then he did what many people do who are under the disciplining hand of God, he said, "Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name." Isn't that what we tend to do, compare ourselves with others? The thought behind this is that we aren't as bad as those you are using against us. Why, they're worse than we ever thought of being. Why aren't you judging them?

I got a traffic ticket the other day in a town known for its crime problems. I had to go to the downtown area on some business. Normally the greatest danger one might feel is that they would be the victim of a mugging, but I had successfully finished my business and was attempting to leave the area, when I looked in my mirror and there was a cop with his red lights on. I had illegally made a right hand turn at a marked intersection. I didn't notice the signs, as what I did is legal at almost every intersection. This intersection evidently has a history of problems, so the signs were posted making a right hand turn illegal. I was somewhat irritated by what happened, and my fallen nature wanted to seize the opportunity to blame someone else. After all, didn't I stop and check traffic and make a perfectly safe turn that is legal in almost every situation? Why should I be held accountable because other drivers had been careless in the past causing someone to decide to put up a sign that I didn't need? Shouldn't the policeman have taken notice that I was a careful driver and wasn't endangering anyone's life; wouldn't a warning have been sufficient? And then there was the other line of thought, why wasn't this policeman working on the crime problem in the city instead of worrying about an old man making a right hand turn against a red light? Fact was, it wasn't the policeman's fault that I didn't observe the sign and he is being paid to enforce the traffic laws, and maybe someday the crime problem will be his assignment, but for that moment, I was his assignment.

It doesn't matter how bad others are, God is concerned with us because he loves us. The policeman may change his clothes and get in his car and commit a far worse violation than I did, but if I have bitterness in my heart, or if I think ugly thoughts about him, I am still guilty before God. It doesn't matter how bad a person the policeman is, if I violate a law that he is being paid to enforce, he is doing his job by enforcing it.

It's not easy to say, it is me oh God, standing in the need of prayer. Humbling ourselves before God and man is difficult to do when everything in us wants to blame someone else. It still remains that the number one problem in man is pride, and rebellion is a very close second.

Chapter Eighty-one

A Prayer for Salvation

Psalm 80

For the director of music. To the tune of “The Lilies of the Covenant.” Of Asaph. A psalm.

¹ Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth ² before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.

³ Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

⁴ O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. ⁶ You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us.

⁷ Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹ You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. ¹¹ It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River.

¹² Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? ¹³ Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it. ¹⁴ Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, ¹⁵ the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself.

¹⁶ Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. ¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. ¹⁸ Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

Regrets, regrets, regrets. When judgment takes away all that has been accumulated and labored for, there is nothing left but regrets. Why, we ask, were we so bad that God had to turn his back on us? Isn't God a God of love?

Badness is not a matter of degrees. It's not so much how many sins or how heinous our crimes that God looks at. It's the condition of our heart that is God's concern.

I believe that I have correctly observed that there are some people who are regarded as rank sinners who have a tender heart towards the Lord, and at the same time I have seen people who are regarded as righteous and even leaders in the church world that have hearts that are hard and full of sinful pride. I sometimes wonder if on the day when all has been said and done and the secrets of hearts have been revealed, who will be seen to have been more righteous?

From the perspective of an observer looking at the condition of Israel, the Psalmist is making a case that Israel is the special possession of the Lord, and that he should be merciful to them as such. He calls God a shepherd, because shepherds treat their flocks tenderly. He refers to Israel as a vine that God planted that filled the land because God blessed them in it. But now he looks about and sees nothing but devastation. The vine is cut down and burned in the fire. Doesn't being God's chosen people exempt us from judgment? Some people seem to think so, they seem to think they can do anything and God won't judge them because, this is the age of grace. God is love, they say, therefore we can do whatever we want and it's okay.

Pent up anger is a terrible thing. The nation of Israel had hurt the heart of God so badly because, they were unfaithful in their hearts to him. He loved them even when love was difficult due to their unbelief and idolatry. He had shown them unfailing and unconditional love, but despite his love and forgiveness they still persisted in their unfaithfulness. Finally the anger of the Lord couldn't be contained any longer. Something had to be done. He lifted his hand of

protection and allowed the armies of her enemies to come in and ravage the land and ravage it they did!

God has all the power, when will we learn that we must not play games with him? The nation of Israel was the object of the love of God, but they didn't understand such love. Their hearts were full of sinful unbelief and evil tendencies had taken up habitation in their fallen natures making pure love beyond them. God deserved love, but they gave him divided hearts. Sin is a bitter wedge that strikes at the heart of pure love. It seeks to divide and destroy everything that is supposed to be pure and good. A little compromise here, a little sinful desire allowed there, and soon evil takes root and sin brings judgment.

People fall in love, they marry and then life and all its challenges happen. Disappointments breeds bitterness, and bitterness begets anger, and anger destroys romance and love, and all that is left is the memory of what was. The little foxes spoil the vine and it's the little sins that spoil the romance in hearts. A little bit of selfishness, self-centeredness, brashness, inconsiderate behaviors, all add up to disappointments and eventual hardening of hearts.

Unfulfilled expectations, unrealistic idealism, along with an inflated view of ones own self worth, combine to make a poisonous brew of violent emotions capable of great devastations. At the heart of many mental and emotional ills is this form of sinful selfism. It eats like a cancer at the heart of any otherwise good relationship.

Under the surface of many relationships is an ugly cancerous wound caused by some sinful indulgence that has wounded the heart of a spouse. The memory of the sin eats at the life flow of all that is good and wholesome. Some people have covered it over and gone on without ever dealing with the real issues. If the sins are not repented of, and forgiveness and healing ministered, the end result will be the death of love. Some sins happen because there is an underlying cause that needs to be diagnosed and treated. If that doesn't happen, no amount of forgiveness will stop the eventual reoccurrences and eventual death to the relationship.

As we look about seeing all the pain that sin has caused, is there any hope for people in this world? Yes, of course there is—if we come to Jesus with repentant hearts, and with forgiveness for those who have wronged us, seek his cleansing and healing. Miracles of healing and restoration are waiting for those who will come and claim them.

The Psalmist looked forward by the Spirit's power and saw the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, an event that happened after the resurrection of Christ Jesus. This was the answer Israel was looking for, and asked that the hand of God would be upon him. Then, the Psalmist knew, Israel would be transformed and never cause anymore sorrow to the heart of God.

¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. ¹⁸ Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

Chapter Eighty-two

Anticipate Blessings

Psalm 81

For the director of music. According to *gittith*. Of Asaph.

¹Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob! ² Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre.

³ Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast; ⁴ this is a decree for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. ⁵ He established it as a statute for Joseph when he went out against Egypt, where we heard a language we did not understand.

⁶ He says, "I removed the burden from their shoulders; their hands were set free from the basket. ⁷ In your distress you called and I rescued you, I answered you out of a thundercloud; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. *Selah*

⁸ "Hear, O my people, and I will warn you— if you would but listen to me, O Israel! ⁹ You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not bow down to an alien god. ¹⁰ I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

¹¹ "But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. ¹² So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.

¹³ "If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways, ¹⁴ how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! ¹⁵ Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever. ¹⁶ But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Sing for joy, shout aloud, begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the harp and lyre, sound the ram's horn, salvation has come to Israel! What a day of rejoicing that will be when the nation of Israel finally recognizes and acknowledges God almighty has come and brought salvation for all people.

As we look at the nation of Israel today, the nation called Palestine is firmly entrenched within their land. They, for the most part, serve a foreign God they call Allah. The nation of Israel is being pressured to accept them and give them part of their land to be an independent nation. The Palestinians for the most part hate Israelis and want to drive them from their land.

God gave the land to Israel and the Palestinians are the wrongful inhabitants. They don't want to hear that because in the short term of history, the land was theirs before the Israelis were drawn back to the land by the will of God. In the beginning the Israelis were content to just be home again and to dwell peacefully with the Palestinian people. Resentment and fear of the Israelis began to ignite tension in the hearts of some of the Palestinians and trouble brewed between people who had at one time been friends and neighbors.

Finally we have come to where we are today, with a wall being built to separate these two nations and suicide bombers seeking to kill as many Israelis as they can. I predict that there will never be peace in the region until the nations of the world recognize that the land God gave the Israelis is their land and respect and honor the Lord God of Israel and let them live in their land, that is, all their land.

The prophets have predicted events that must come to pass before what I just wrote can ever be a reality, and come to pass they will. There will be painful world shaking events take place, but what God has decreed will come to pass.

Though there is a prophetic message here for the nation of Israel, the principles also apply to the lives of all God's people whether Israeli or not. There is a sense in which all Christians are also Israelis. We have become one with Christ, and therefore, we are also inheritors of the promise. As a branch can be grafted into the stump of a tree and bear fruit after its kind, so Christians have been grafted into the stump of the lineage of Abraham, though of a different original lineage, we bear our fruit according to the promises God gave through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and indeed all the prophets that followed them. We as Christians, feel close to the nation of Israel because, we are also of Christ who is their redeemer though most of them have not come to him at this time.

The principle in this Psalm that is of particular value to all Christians is the principle of anticipatory worship. We understand that God is about to pour out a blessing upon us that is great and therefore, we break out in songs of praise and worship. In fact, God is worthy of great praise and worship even if he does nothing in return!

On a personal note, I praise God just because I love him and want to express the great love I have for him. If he blesses me with some special consideration, that is a good thing, but I praise him just because I love him. This is the peaceful kind of relationship we as dear children enjoy with the Lord. Our love for him is a constant in difficult times or in times of great abundance. When we are in the midst of painful experiences, we love him, when we are in the midst of perplexing times, not knowing what will be tomorrow, we love him. We fully trust him because we know he loves us and whatever comes will come from his loving heart so long as we devotedly continue with him. We have learned to make him our God, and to never trust in anything but his providing hand.

This Psalm encourages praise in anticipation of what God is about to do! Get all excited, sing to the Lord, play instruments of praise to him, not to get him to act but because we know he is about to do great and mighty things among us!

The Psalmist no sooner encourages anticipatory worship than he also issues a warning. Do not set a foreign God before you. With blessing and liberty comes responsibility. The Lord may bless a person who is blind with eyesight to see, but those eyes may see what eyes should never look upon. Ears unstopped may not only hear the voice of singing and the voice of a friend but they may also hear words they would have been better off not to have ever heard! With added blessing, comes an added challenge to our faith!

Ah, the curse of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil! We cannot know good without the potential for evil being present. Evil is the absence of good, so if we turn from the good, evil is present with us. Light is another example given in the scriptures to instruct us. Darkness is the absence of light; therefore, if we abandon the light or leave the place where the source of light is at, darkness will increase as we go beyond the reach of the light. Light is an energy that emanates from a source and without the source being in full view only retained light or reflected light remains. God is light, and what comes from him is light. Light is also synonymous with truth. God is truth, and what comes from him is truth. These two concepts are used interchangeably so as to enable us to conceptualize what is being taught here.

When God introduces us to a new concept or truth, or expands the arena of our experience, we also are exposed to the reality that no matter how much light there seems to be all about us, we still must remember that it all comes from a source. If we allow an object to get between the source and us, what will remain will be reflected light and also diminished light. The larger or greater the object, the greater will be the shadow that it casts. Living in the shadow is to lose sight of the source. When we lose sight of the source we also experience a diminished love that comes from the source God.

Love like light is an energy or expression that emanates from a source. If we are to enjoy the benefits of love, we must always be careful to keep the source of our love from being interfered with by allowing objects, ideas, attitudes, or deeds from getting between the source of our love and us.

When God called Israel out of Egypt, they had an opportunity to enjoy a most unusual relationship with God. All they had to do was believe in him. If they had a need, all they had to do was ask him, and he was there for them. Somehow due to the hardness of their hearts, they failed to comprehend this truth. Unbelief filled their hearts despite the miracle that had just occurred. Their minds were clouded with unbelief and they failed to believe that the same mighty power that delivered them from Egypt, could give them water to drink. Then after God brought them to a pool of water and they found it was bitter, they failed to believe that he could also make it good to drink.

God's power is equal to any and all challenges. Some people can believe for healing but cannot believe for a financial miracle. When will we comprehend that God is an all-encompassing God and that his power is for any and every kind of problem? God wants us to come to him in absolute faith no matter what it is that we need.

“If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways, ¹⁴ how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! ¹⁵ Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever. ¹⁶ But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

Chapter Eighty-three

Be Gods?

Psalm 82

A psalm of Asaph.

¹ God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the “gods”;

² “How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah* ³ Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. ⁴ Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

⁵ “They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

⁶ “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ ⁷ But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler.”

⁸ Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.

Do you want to be a god? Some people do. The desire to be like God or to be a god is the stuff that cults are made of! Satan approached Eve with the temptation to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so she would be like God knowing such things.

Christians are called children of God, because they have been born again. This is not the same as being a god, but I suppose, there is a sense in which that might apply. True Christians don’t want to be a god, but rather worship the true and the living God. The true believer is a person whose whole life passion is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and our Father in Heaven. If being a son of God makes a person a god in the sense of the Psalm before us, then there is also a resultant responsibility.

Before we continue this discussion it would be wise to point out that the Hebrew word for god is used for any exalted person, being or perceived being. This is why we capitalize the word when referring to the Lord God Almighty. A king or judge might be addressed using the title god much like we address judges with the title “your honor”. The distinction is clear from the usage, and as is seen in Psalm 82:6-7 “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler.”

Being a god, if that is what we are, doesn’t exempt us from judgment or from the true fact that we will also die like mere men. Anyone who seizes upon a scripture such as this to try to gain some advantage over someone else is a very ignorant individual. Whatever godhood seem to be manifest in any human being is seen as evidence of the presence of the power of God that has come to live in us. Our godhood is derived from the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, and therefore, cannot be claimed as any personal possession or status. God will not be mocked, nor will he share his glory with any man. Without a doubt it is a huge honor to be a vessel that God allows to be used to manifest the mighty power of his personage through, but it is not our power, it is his.

God places ministries within the church to fill certain needs within the body of believers. These positions bring a certain need for honor and respect, but the individual so blessed must

always remember the honor is derived from the position, not his person. If the person fills the position honorably, he deserves credit for his obedience and service, but not exaltation to some higher plateau than any other servant. We may be good servants, even excellent servants, but servants we are.

Man can never be a god or God, in God's class for very obvious reasons. God is creator of all; we can only create from what has been created. God is eternal, always has been and always will be, we obviously had a beginning. God is omnipotent—that is, all-powerful—we can only use the power that already exists. God is everywhere present; we are confined to the body in which we were created. God is omniscient, we must learn whatever it is that we know.

Pride is what makes men want to be a god. The true and living God will certainly judge such folly. If we seek honor, we will be stripped of all honor! There was one who was truly God made flesh and dwelt among us, his name was and is Jesus. To him be all the honor and the glory forever and ever.

Chapter Eighty-Four

Let God Speak

Psalm 83

A song. A psalm of Asaph.

¹ O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still. ² See how your enemies are astir, how your foes rear their heads. ³ With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish. ⁴ "Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more."

⁵ With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you— ⁶ the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, of Moab and the Hagrites, ⁷ Gebal, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, with the people of Tyre. ⁸ Even Assyria has joined them to lend strength to the descendants of Lot. *Selah*

⁹ Do to them as you did to Midian, as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, ¹⁰ who perished at Endor and became like refuse on the ground. ¹¹ Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, ¹² who said, "Let us take possession of the pasturelands of God."

¹³ Make them like tumbleweed, O my God, like chaff before the wind. ¹⁴ As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze, ¹⁵ so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm. ¹⁶ Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name, O LORD.

¹⁷ May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace. ¹⁸ Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD— that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

When the nation of Israel was in the desert after coming out of Egypt, Moses would give the command to move out and follow the cloud of God's presence in this manner, "Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you." Whenever it came to rest, he said, "Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel." (Numbers 10:35-36)

In the intervening years the relationship of God to his people had become strained as a result of their constant involvement with idolatry and all the associated sins.

This Psalm is a prayer to God in the spirit of the prayer of Moses as they moved through the desert. It's a prayer of petition to God to return and take up a defense in behalf of the nation that has come under the oppression of enemies. It's always good to have Almighty God as your

defense, but there is a price to pay, as it were, to have God on your side. The price is not one that is beyond what is reasonable—just serve the Lord with your whole heart, soul and mind. There is no other God really, except in the vain imaginations of the minds of men.

Is God ever concerned about what mortal men think about him? I think the Israelis thought that God was concerned. Maybe he is concerned but I feel sure it is not because what we think about him makes him feel insecure about who he is. God is God because that is who he is, just as I am a man because that is what I am. I am what I am because God made me this way. I am made to fulfill the purpose for which I was created. This does not mean that I will fulfill that purpose; that is dependant upon my choices. I can choose to serve the Lord or I can choose to disobey the Lord, what ever my choice is determines some part of the fulfillment of that purpose.

There is an irresistible purpose of God, thus it is said that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance.

The nation of Israel was called by God to fulfill a purpose that was to bring salvation to all mankind. It involved the call to bring God's book the Bible to all people everywhere, but how they did it was largely determined by their willingness to obey the Lord. The story in the Bible is one of a loving and gracious God dealing with wayward men and how God related to their unfaithfulness and showed love to them despite their shortcomings.

This Psalms 83 seems to be an appeal to the faithfulness of God despite the reasons why the appeal needed to be made in the first place. When men walk faithfully with the Lord, obeying what he has commanded them to do, conducting their lives in reverence to him, no appeal for protection is needed. God made a covenant with Israel that if they would obey him he would bless all aspects of their lives including protection from their enemies. Health, wealth and freedom were their guaranteed portion.

It seemed like a small price to pay for the ultimate lifestyle earth is capable of giving people. God desired to make them an example to the nations of what it is like to serve the Lord. It was difficult to accomplish because the people were constantly in violation of some aspect of the law.

Finally, David came along and got close to the heart of God because he loved God and faithfully served the Lord. There is absolutely no hint that David ever indulged in any form of idolatry. His sins were sins from his fallen nature, driven by his sexual drive that was not always under the total discipline of obedience. He also had a problem with telling the truth when it came to his enemies. These sins were troubling to him; therefore we have Psalms of repentance and appeals to the loving and faithful nature of God.

God blessed the nation of Israel for David's sake, especially under the kingship of Solomon. The blessing was cut short after Solomon's death because unlike David, Solomon worshipped idols as a result of his marriages to heathen women. Despite Israel's failings, God gave the world a brief view of what it is like to please the Lord. It was indeed a special blessing because even while it was happening, disqualifying sins were being committed. It was after all, grace personified. God wanted the world to see what it is missing by not serving God; that was his irresistible purpose, but it was short lived because of sin. What they had under Solomon should have been what they had all along and would have had if they had just obeyed the Lord.

One night I was returning to my home in Grass Valley California from a Bible Study in Reno Nevada, when a man approached me while I was getting gas at a filling station. He saw my Bible on the dash of my car and inquired if it meant something special to me. I replied that it did and he then asked if he could speak to me. I walked away from those with me so we could speak privately, and he began telling me how he was once a missionary and later an associate pastor and how he had fallen into deep sin. He was living a sinful lifestyle and was disturbed because he knew he was sinning. He told me how he would sometimes go to a church service and be sitting in the service and feel the unction of the Spirit indicating that the Spirit desired to give a message of prophecy to the congregation, but because he was living a sinful life he would not bring it forth though he had often done so before his fall into sin.

I am sure it was to his credit that he revered the Holy Spirit enough to not bring the message, but it served to illustrate that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. This man was still called, but his lifestyle had robbed him of his blessing. He asked me what he should do, and all I could tell him was to truly repent. I wished afterward that I had put him in my car and taken him home and nurtured him back to spiritual health, but I didn't think of it at the time. I did walk the streets of Reno later in the hope that I would somehow see him again, but it wasn't to be. I will look for him in heaven after this life is over, perhaps he did find a place of repentance after all. Had the man repented immediately after the first encounter with sin, how different his testimony would have been.

One thing seems to be lacking in this Psalm, it is the voice of repentance. There had been events that were the catalyst that caused it to be written. Perhaps the author didn't see a need for repentance because he may have felt that he was doing just fine, obeying the Lord faithfully in his life. Even the nation as a whole for the most part had an outward show of religion, but sin filled the hearts of the people.

I am reminded of the Pharisees and a tax collector in the temple that Jesus told about in Luke 18:9-14. The tax collector was in the corner beating his chest and asking God to be merciful to him because he was a sinner. The Pharisee was also praying but his prayer was a prayer of thanksgiving to God because he wasn't like the publican, guilty of the violations of the law. I don't read that the Lord contradicted the Pharisee, but rather, he indicated that he didn't leave justified like the tax collector did. The evident reason was that the Pharisee was a sinner, but because of his life of obedience to the law, didn't know it. He thought that disobedience to the law is what makes a man a sinner.

If we don't understand the problem we won't get the answer right. We sin because we are sinners, born in sin and our being was formed in iniquity. How many sins we commit is not what makes us sinners, sin is a condition that needs a cure, and that is what Jesus came to do. Repentance is fundamentally acknowledging the fact that we have the disease called sin. It is fatal if not cured. Jesus has the remedy available to all of us, and it is administered in response to our asking him for it; that is faith in action.

Chapter Eighty-Five

The Glory of the Lord's House

Psalm 84

For the director of music. According to *gittith*. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! ²My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

³Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God. ⁴Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. *Selah*

⁵Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. ⁶As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. ⁷They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

⁸Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. *Selah* ⁹Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.

¹⁰ Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. ¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

¹² O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Hungering for God is a gift that comes to those who are willing to appreciate it and treasure it. Only those whose hearts have felt the glory of the presence of the Lord can say from a pure heart's desire, "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." The more we are in the presence of the Lord, the more we want to be in the presence of the Lord.

The Psalmist must have noticed a swallow making a nest in the sanctuary of the Lord and felt that it was because it felt safe and cared for near the altar of the Lord. The house of the Lord is a safe place! We can come to the Lord and express anything and everything that is on our hearts and he is there for us. Even in our hour of trial, he is there for us, to comfort and console us. The Psalmist had discovered that the presence of the Lord is a wonderful place to dwell in. He could no doubt go there and find total peace. He felt loved and protected and all the turmoil of life was left outside this hollowed place.

Where is the sanctuary of the Lord to be found? This question was discussed one day as Jesus talked to the woman at the well in Samaria. Her tradition taught them to go to a location in Gerizim and the Jews would go to Jerusalem. She wanted to know which was the correct location. Jesus seized the opportunity to explain that it is neither, but rather, it is in worshipping the Lord in Spirit and in Truth.

And so it is today, the argument still persists, isn't it special to go to the temple mount and worship God? The Muslims have their Mosque there and the Jews want to rebuild their temple, and so the struggle goes on. People die over the issue of, where is the holy place, where a man can meet God?

Those who really know the Lord know that it is not in any special place; it is a matter of the heart. Some people think that it is a certain church that has the special presence in it, but some people go to church after church and never meet God on a personal basis. It is not Gerizim or Jerusalem; it is where ever you are when you worship God in a special way. For some people it is when they listen to Christian music, or just pray while going about the everyday events of life. Some who are commuters use the time to worship God. Could a car be a holy place where a soul can meet God? The answer to that question all depends on the person and how they use the time.

Once a year the Muslims make a pilgrimage to Mecca to pray in what they think is a holy place. The true worshippers of God, however, see pilgrimage as being a state of living, the very course of life that sometimes leads through the Valley of Baca, or sorrows. What the Valley of Baca was to the Psalmist is somewhat a point of speculation, as it could be rendered a grove of balsam trees, or perhaps a dry place, where water would gather when it rained. Traditionally it was also believed to figuratively mean a place of sorrows.

Whatever it meant to the Palmist, it was a place that when those who are on divine pilgrimage pass through they make it a place of springs. Have you passed through your Valley of Baca? If you passed this way with Jesus the Messiah with you, you found that what was meant to bring sorrow was an opportunity for him to transform it into a spring where the water of life flows freely.

We are the ones who determine whether an event of life is a valley of springs or a valley of sorrows. It all depends on what view of things we hold to. Do we see life as an opportunity to reach for the Lord and to walk through challenging circumstances with him at our side? Or do we see challenging circumstances as impending doom, destruction waiting to happen to us? It all depends on our concept of God and his love and care for us. If we truly believe in him, trust in him, and know that his love for us is not based on any personal worthiness or righteousness, but rather on his goodness and mercy, we will be able to believe in him, talk to him, and see his salvation.

When a heart begins to truly worship God as the Psalmist did, he realizes that God honors his anointed one, the “Lord Jesus Christ”. Why the Jewish people are blind to the reality that it is Jesus, who is the hope of the nation as well as the world, is beyond me. The message is so clear, so rooted in the words they cherish, but one day the scales will fall from their eyes and they like the brothers of Joseph of old, will see that this Jesus they crucified, this Jesus who has been honored and worshipped by the nations of the world, is indeed their brother and messiah.

The Psalmist realized what a privilege it is to dwell in the house or presence of God. Jesus promised that he will never leave us or forsake us, bringing us to the same conclusion of the Psalmist, that it is better to dwell in the house of the Lord, even if for one day as a door keeper, than to live in the house of the wicked for a thousand days. I think we can safely say, it is far better, because; the house of the wicked is a place of uncertainty, violence, strife, where self-interest is the rule of the day. There is no true safety outside the care of the Lord. “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you. (Psalms 84:11-12)

Chapter Eighty-six

When God Revisits His People

Psalm 85

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

¹ You showed favor to your land, O LORD; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. ² You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. *Selah* ³ You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger.

⁴ Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. ⁵ Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? ⁶ Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? ⁷ Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

⁸ I will listen to what God the LORD will say; he promises peace to his people, his saints— but let them not return to folly. ⁹ Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. ¹¹ Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. ¹² The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. ¹³ Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

Grace, wonderful grace, God is gracious to forgive the sins and iniquities of his people when they come to him repentantly. When God truly forgives, he also restores his loving care and protection to his people.

Over and over again the nation of Israel turned to the Lord for forgiveness and mercy. They especially turned to the Lord when an enemy threatened them. Why must we wait for enemies to threaten us before we call upon the name of the Lord? The Lord promises peace to his people, but God does not want people to return to the ways of sinful living when he has just put away their sins!

God wants people to want to be in his presence, because, being in his presence gives him an opportunity to bless them. Obedience to the Lord is the means of coming into his presence, but

too often people come to him to get some crisis solved and then they go back to life as usual. For the nation of Israel, life as usual was not according to the commands of the Lord.

During the time period when the nation was split into two parts, Israel and Judah, Israel particularly worshipped in a perverse way, not going to Jerusalem to worship as they had before. From that time onward, they were very prone to idolatry, and even when they attempted to worship the Lord, they did it in a way that resembled idolatry. At the time when the split occurred, King Jeroboam out of fear, forbid the people from going to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, so he set up alternate sites for their worship. When he did this he also made them golden calves to worship and declared that the calves had brought them up from Egypt. This is like what Aaron had done while Moses was on the Mount getting the Ten Commandments from God.

Judah also had been infiltrated by idolatry during the reign of Solomon. Idolatry filled the land from that day onward with only short periods of repentance and cleansing.

Serving the Lord was always rewarded by so many advantages, but sin had such a grip upon the people that it seemed that they could not comprehend that what they were doing was bringing judgment upon them. As a result of sin's pull, people need to be taught to fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and when fear is allowed to be forgotten, wisdom is also lost. Solomon was a man gifted with enormous wisdom, and in the beginning had the fear of the Lord upon him. As time went on, his love for heathen women pulled him away from the Lord, and when these compromises didn't bring an immediate tragedy, he was emboldened to continue down the path of compromise. Solomon built temples for his heathen wives to worship their heathen idols in, and as time went on he also went with them and worshipped their God's with them. The fear of the Lord would have forbid such conduct but somewhere along the way he stopped fearing the Lord.

Bad company corrupts good morals and it was the influence of evil people that caused the Israelites to wander from God. When people see the sinners doing well in their lives, getting good jobs, building or buying beautiful homes, traveling and doing all sorts of sinful things and still not experiencing judgment, they are emboldened to follow them in their folly. Sometimes it's hard to stay focused upon what God has said when the world says and does otherwise and seems to be doing just fine. Judgment delayed is what causes the loss of the fear of the Lord. The righteous in heart do not forget, however, and love keeps them close to the Lord.

In verses 10-13 of Psalms 85, the psalmist speaks of love and faithfulness as being like two separate entities that meet together, and that faithfulness is of the earth. So one might conclude that love is otherworldly, and that righteousness too is looking from heaven for an earthly place to find fellowship. I think it is safe to say that the psalmist had tapped into the heart of God because God is love and love must find faithfulness to commune with. For the feet of God to touch the earth a place of righteousness must be secured for his feet, and thus righteousness and peace can come together in the intimacy of a kiss. This seems to suggest that the psalmist had come to the realization that God desires an intimate form of love from human hearts, love that involves devotion and faithfulness in righteousness. Are not these the necessary ingredients of a deep and lasting relationship even between humans? Is it asking too much for worshippers to worship the Lord God exclusively?

¹⁰ Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. ¹¹ Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. ¹² The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. ¹³ Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.